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Identifying and Addressing Challenges Encountered by Educators of Aboriginal Children in an Urban Setting

by

Ross C. Danyluk ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

in

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Abstract

This interpretive, descriptive study examined areas of challenge experienced by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school. As well, this study explored the strategies evolved by these educators to address the challenges.

The study employed the case study method. The setting was a school in a large urban school district in Western Canada that served only Aboriginal students ranging from Grades 5 to 9. Data were collected through semistructured interviews of 14 participants. Deductive and inductive thematic data analysis procedures were used.

On the basis of the literature reviewed, a conceptual framework was developed that guided this study. An expanded conceptual framework emerged from the findings and was incorporated as emerging theory.

The findings were presented in four categories: (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators. The major themes associated with student challenges were student learning preferences, poor attendance, lack of preparedness for school, inability to adapt to a structured educational environment, student behaviors, and lack of respect for education.

The major themes that emerged with parent challenges were family poverty, inadequate parenting skills, and parental distrust of mainstream education. Major educator challenges were educator cultural conflict, high degrees of

job-related stress, and lack of staff cohesion. Major challenges associated with administrators emerged as the school's present mandate, the practice of segregating Aboriginal students, basic skill acquisition, overall disrespect for the school as demonstrated by the district, and scarcity of resources.

The major themes that emerged related to strategies used with students were relationship building, establishing and maintaining high expectations, being flexible, making adjustments to curriculum and instruction, and modelling. The strategies evolved for working with parents included relationship building between parents and educators, and holding parents accountable for educational issues pertaining to their children.

Two major themes emerged to describe the strategies used with educators: increasing educator awareness of Aboriginal culture, and proactively maintaining staff wellness. Adjustments to the programming, timetable, and overall mandate of the school were the major themes that emerged in describing strategies used to address the challenges facing administrators.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it identified areas of challenge experienced by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school. As well, this study examined strategies used by educators to address these challenges. Sindell (1974) used the term *cultural conflict* to describe the experiences of children from cultural minority backgrounds in schools that are assumed to operate on and transmit mainstream middle-class values. This term could also be used to describe educators who were brought up and educated in mainstream ideals and philosophies and who face the challenge of adjusting their ideologies to better serve the educational needs of nonmainstream students.

Referring to multicultural education, Avery and Walker (1993) reported that "there is evidence that most teachers have limited knowledge about cultural and linguistic groups different from their own" (p. 27). They described an American study conducted in 1988 that found that "forty percent of ... preservice teachers felt that they were not prepared with adequate skills for teaching multicultural populations" (p. 27).

In a Canadian setting Danyluk (1996) discovered that recent teacher graduates in central Alberta who teach Aboriginal children experience higher degrees of job-related stress than more experienced teachers do. I believe that this finding was due, in part, to the presence of unique

educational challenges that face educators of Aboriginal children -- challenges that are not well addressed in teacher preparation and inservice programs.

I further believe that as teachers gain more experience in working with Aboriginal students, they develop teaching strategies in the field to assist them in meeting the unique educational needs of these children. These needs are well researched and represented in the literature.

From a cross-cultural perspective, McAlpine and Crago (1995) asserted that

> if teachers come from cultures ... [that] are very different from those of their students and the teachers do not modify their interactions, children will find it more difficult to participate in classroom structures and succeed. Similarly, teachers will find it harder to feel and be successful because students are not participating in ways that they expect. In other words, if the culture is not the same, the presumption of shared identity soon breaks down and unless new beliefs about the students emerge, teachers may end up blaming the students for not learning. (p. 404)

In addition, Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987) acknowledged that "cues that help us function effectively in our own culture may be misleading in a cross-cultural situation" (p. 6). Therefore, "until we learn the cues of the other culture, we find ourselves in an unstructured situation, not knowing what to do or what to expect" (p. 6).

Statement of the Problem

This study explored (a) the challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school,

and (b) strategies that educators use to address these challenges.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

2. What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified?

3. How did these strategies evolve?

Significance of the Study

In Canada, by constitutional right, schooling is made available to all children on equal terms. As educators work with students of various cultural backgrounds, for example, Aboriginal students, there are obvious as well as subtle differences in learning styles, cultural customs, and values that do not always synchronize with the expectations of teachers. This has confirmed the need for educators to adopt a multicultural approach to all aspects of education, which was supported by Johnson and Ramirez (1990), who remarked that teachers must "understand and consider the special circumstances of distinct cultural groups in society in order to provide culturally diverse children with more appropriate educational services" (p. vii). Corson (1991) observed that

> teachers who are not members of the local social network, who travel into the community each day and draw their conclusions about it from the filtered impressions that they receive from their students and from the caricatured descriptions that often circulate in the staffrooms of schools, may be highly biased in their assessments of the school's sociocultural context. (p. 10)

In a similar vein, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) claimed that successful teachers of Aboriginal children focus on a "sociocultural perspective" (p. 2) in their teaching approach.

In further reference to teachers of Aboriginal children, McAlpine and Crago (1995) maintained that, as a "result of their training, teachers often assume a particular cultural stance with regard to the classroom interactions that they engage in" (p. 404). Furthermore, "the Aboriginal children whom they teach frequently come from cultural backgrounds that are quite dissimilar from these educators" (p. 404). With this in mind, Wilson (1994) argued that it is necessary for teachers to develop an understanding of the culture of Aboriginal children in order to "sensitize themselves into giving effective caring instruction, and to fit their knowledge into the value system of their students" (p. 314).

Moreover, Wilson (1991) said that "the lack of understanding of cultural conflict on the part of school personnel contributes to student failure" (p. 379). Similarly, Johnson and Ramirez (1990) wrote that "there are students who continuously meet with academic failure because

of incompatibilities between the way they learn and the way teachers teach" (p. 9).

Lack of Research

According to Ramsey (1989), there are "relatively few studies ... which examine specific teaching skills and styles that are related to the success or failure of children from different ethnic backgrounds" (p. 53). She further stated that a major intent of multicultural education is "to ensure that all children are taught in ways that are most effective, and that respect is built on their cultural styles and experiences" (p. 53).

From an Alberta perspective, research was conducted in 1978 in the Edmonton Catholic School District addressing the administrative implications of Aboriginal students in that district. It was revealed that "the vast majority of Edmonton Catholic School System personnel agrees that Native students tend to be unsuccessful in school" (Zyp & Campbell, 1978, p. 143).

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout the dissertation:

Aboriginal. *Aboriginal* is a term that refers to people of Native Indian, Métis, or Inuit descent. Another term commonly used is *First Nations*.

Mooniyaw. *Mooniyaw* is the Cree word that is used to describe the *White Man*.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters and two appendices. Chapter I contains an introduction and background to the research problem, as well as a statement of the problem, three research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of terms unique to the study.

Chapter II reviews research related to the study and relevant to the development of a conceptual framework. This chapter also contains the conceptual framework that provided the underpinnings for the study.

Chapter III consists of an examination of the school and sampling procedures used in this study. A description of the research method is presented, as well as an examination of the literature relating to the case study approach to qualitative research. The chapter also describes the sampling procedures used in this study and the data-collection and analysis procedures. As well, the chapter discusses the various aspects of rigor, methodological assumptions, limitations, delimitations, issues of confidentiality, and ethical considerations.

Chapter IV presents the findings that addressed the first research question: What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

Chapter V discusses the findings of the previous chapter. The chapter contains references to the field work, the literature, and my observations.

Chapter VI presents the findings supporting the second and third research questions on the strategies educators use to address the challenges identified, and on how these strategies evolved?

Chapter VII discusses the findings presented in Chapter VI. Once again, references to the field work, the literature, and my observations are offered

Chapter VIII provides an overview of the study, as well as a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of my personal reflections.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter the literature examining issues relating to Aboriginal education is reviewed. The chapter is presented in 10 sections: (a) introduction, (b) multicultural and intercultural education, (c) three classifications of minorities, (d) Aboriginal culture and history, (e) learning styles, (f) teaching styles, (g) characteristics of non-Native teachers of Aboriginal students, (h) factors and strategies influencing teaching success, and (i) stressors and difficulties of teachers of Aboriginal students. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework for the study.

Introduction

Researchers such as Atleo (1991) have been critical of the handling of Aboriginal education in Canada. Atleo claimed that "the history of Native education in Canada has been a trauma, the effects of which may be felt for some time to come" (p. 1). A document titled *Native Education in Alberta: Alberta Native People's Views on Native Education* (Alberta Education, 1987a) also highlighted areas of concern with the status of Aboriginal education. This paper reported that Aboriginal people want the implementation of "alternative and cultural support programs within the public schools ... to meet the unique needs of Native students"

(p. 10).

With this in mind, the Alberta Department of Education, in another document titled *Policy Statement on Native Education in Alberta* (Alberta Education, 1987b), presented the following standpoint with respect to Aboriginal education:

> The aim of Native education is to develop the knowledge, the skills, and the positive attitudes of Native students so that they will be self-confident, capable, and committed to setting goals, to making informed choices, and acting in ways that will improve their own lives, and the life of both Native and non-Native communities throughout Alberta. (p. 3)

Furthermore, this document acknowledged "that Native education must be attuned to the diverse needs, cultures, and lifestyles of Native students" (p. 3).

It is prudent to be aware, however, that educators must balance an understanding of, and appreciation for, the uniqueness of Aboriginal learners with a restraint from stereotyping or generalizing. Johnson and Ramirez (1990) reinforced this through their assertion that we must "recognize that although Native cultures share many common values and practices, there are also distinct differences across groups" (p. 1). In response, the next section reviews the literature pertaining to issues of multicultural and intercultural education, including implications for teacher-education programs.

Multicultural and Intercultural Education

There has been a wealth of research literature addressing multicultural education. Vold (1989) remarked that education "has traditionally been dominated by a monocultural perspective reflecting the assimilationist values of the larger society" (p. 3). Furthermore, "this system of education has excluded the values, customs, history, and access to power of racial and ethnic 'minority' groups in society" (p. 3).

In response, Roth (1992) wrote that "there is a deep recognition of the fact that ... [we are] becoming more diverse and the instructional work force must reflect this" (p. 7). In a similar vein, Banks (1995) argued that, truly to achieve multiculturalism, "institutional changes must be made, including changes in the curriculum;... teaching and learning styles;... and behaviors of teachers and administrators" (pp. 3-4).

Lynch (1983) described multiculturalism as

> the initiation of children into critical-rational acceptance of cultural diversity and the creative affirmation of individual and group differences within a common humanity. That means that it is a process conducted according to explicit, rational evaluative criteria: an ethical process, celebrating both diversity and unity, social differentiation and cohesion, stability and deliberate, systematic and evaluated changes according to explicit yardsticks, themselves the subject of critical discourse. (p. 14)

Describing the purpose of multicultural education, Banks (1995) pointed to the need to "reform the school and

other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality" (p. 3). He identified four "phases of multicultural education" (p. 10), which were categorized as (a) ethnic studies; (b) multiethnic education; (c) women and people with disabilities; and (d) race, class, and gender. Of these four phases, "the later [two] phases tend to be more prominent than the earlier ones, at least in the theoretical literature, if not in practice" (p. 11).

In Canada, according to Vold (1989), the term *intercultural education* is used to describe "educational programs in other western societies with culturally diverse populations" (p. 14). As well, "this term is used to describe a content-type of process which emphasizes patterns of beliefs and behaviors, values, and mores of minority peoples" (p. 14).

Both Vold (1989) and Banks (1995), in referring to multicultural education, identified 1977 as a momentous year because it was in that year, in the United States, that the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) released the document *Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Education*. In it were "standards [which] required all of its [NCATE] member teacher-education institutions, which comprised approximately 80% of the teacher-education programs in the United States, to

implement components, courses, and programs in multicultural education" (Banks, 1995, p. 11).

However, in light of the work described by Banks (1995), the journey toward truly implementing the multicultural paradigm is far from complete. According to Vold (1989), "The multicultural education movement has suffered much criticism since its inception" (p. 11). Furthermore, "attempts to gain full acceptance have been hampered by confusion and debate over the meaning of multicultural education, its philosophical basis, and its viability as a process for bringing about equity in society" (p. 11).

In reference to this decade, Johnson and Ramirez (1990) concluded that educators need to "understand and consider the special circumstances of distinct cultural groups in society in order to provide culturally diverse children with more appropriate educational services" (p. vii).

Alberta Education (1987a) pointed out that "Native people identified the development of positive attitudes among non-Native students and educators as a priority" (p. 10). In a similar vein, Tamas (1982) maintained that, to promote an authentic, mutual understanding of the intricacies of Aboriginal education,

> Education is required for both groups. [Further,] unless the dominant sector is willing to undergo changes in outlook comparable in scale to those so clearly called for by the educational programs proposed for the Native sector, the result is likely to remain an inadequate accommodation of the weaker

> party to the inflexible attitudes and expectations of the other. (p. 46)

The importance of adopting a multicultural approach to education is undeniable. Nevertheless, this is difficult without a thorough understanding of the diversity among minority groups. This is examined in the next section.

Three Classifications of Minorities

In this section of the chapter, I present the framework devised by Ogbu (1993), which proposes that people of minority subscribe to one of three distinct categories. In addition, distinction is made between majority and minority cultures.

As a result of examining variability in school performance among minority students, Ogbu (1993) developed a framework that classified minority groups into three distinct categories:

> One is *autonomous minorities*. These are people who are minorities primarily in a numerical sense. They may possess a distinctive ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural identity.... Autonomous minorities do not experience disproportionate and persistent problems in learning to read and to compute, partly because they usually have a cultural frame of reference that demonstrates and encourages school success. This type of minority is typically represented ... by Jews and Mormons.... *Immigrant minorities* are the second type. These are the people who have moved more or less voluntarily to the United States because they believe that this would lead to greater economic well-being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom.... The Chinese ... and Punjabi Indians ... are representative examples. *Castelike* or *involuntary minorities* are people who were *originally brought into United States society involuntarily* through slavery, conquest, or colonization. Thereafter,

> these minorities were relegated to menial positions and denied true assimilation into mainstream society.... Indians ... are [an] example. (pp. 91-92)

The framework presented by Ogbu (1993), according to Gibson (1997a),

> has focused on two types of forces that influence the cultural models guiding student behavior in school: the first is the nature of the history, subordination, and exploitation of the minorities, including the initial terms by which a particular group was incorporated into the society in which it now exists; the second is the nature of the adaptive response, both instrumental and expressive, that the group has made to the subsequent discriminatory treatment that it has experienced. (p. 319)

Majority Culture

"The majority culture in Canada is generally considered to consist of the white, middle class, economically self-sufficient population who tend to live in either the suburbs or the geographic hinterland adjacent to a larger urban centre" (Goddard, 1996, p. 18). This group of people "is not homogeneous but also includes what Ogbu (1993) refers to as 'autonomous minorities,' groups which are culturally different but otherwise similar in appearance" (p. 18).

Minority Cultures

Ogbu's (1993) remaining two major types or categories of minorities, immigrant and involuntary, comprise what Goddard (1996) referred to as "those not of the majority" (p. 19). The effect of minority status on school performance is described next.

Differences in school performance. Attempting to analyze apparent variability in educational performance experienced among the minority groups, Ogbu (1993) posed these questions: "Why do some minorities successfully cross cultural boundaries and/or opportunity barriers and do well in school?" and "Why do some minorities not succeed in crossing cultural boundaries and/or opportunity barriers and, therefore, do not perform as well in school?" (p. 88).

As previously mentioned, Aboriginal peoples align most with Ogbu's (1993) classification of involuntary minorities. With this in mind, attempting to decipher the differences between the success rates of immigrant children and those of involuntary groups, Ogbu concluded that "immigrant minority children in the public schools ... do not manifest the kinds of attitudes and behaviors commonly found among involuntary minority children in the public schools" (p. 105). He maintained that "there are complex community forces that make it more difficult for involuntary minorities to overcome their initial school problems" (p. 101). Of these forces, one of the more prevalent is "the oppositional nature of their cultural frame of reference and identity" (p. 101). Furthermore, "involuntary minorities tend to equate school learning with the learning of the white ... cultural frame of reference and to equate following the standard practices and related activities of the school that

enhance academic success and social adjustment with 'acting white'" (p. 102).

From a Canadian perspective, Cummins (1997) reported that "the available educational achievement data present a complex picture that conforms in some respects to predictions derived from Ogbu's distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities" (p. 412). In a similar vein, Gibson (1997b) claimed that in Canada, "immigrant students perform on the whole as well as or better than the dominant Anglo-Canadian group, while the First Nations and francophones, both involuntary minorities by Ogbu's criteria, perform less well" (p. 431).

Although I recognize the impact of Ogbu's framework on understanding differences among minority groups and thus multicultural education, the scope of this study was to focus specifically on aspects of Aboriginal education. With this in mind, the following section reviews the literature specific to cultural and historical aspects of Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal Culture and History

Describing the origin of Western Aboriginal culture, Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas (1990) asserted that "the values of traditional Native ... culture arose primarily ... within the context of a ... hunting and gathering type of economy" (p. 129). Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) characterized Aboriginal peoples as having "rich histories

and cultural heritages that have always served as a foundation for preparing future generations for meaningful and productive lives" (p. 1). In addition, they recognized that "traditionally, Native elders took on the responsibility for teaching new generations the skills, traditions, and knowledge of their people" (p. 1). Similarly, Heit (1993) claimed that the "oral traditions of First Nations peoples ... [f]or centuries ... have served to pass on the religious philosophies, the histories, and the ethics of the particular cultures from which they originate" (p. 6).

Referring to present educational trends, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) suggested that the "educational strategies of the elders which emphasized cooperation and reflection are remarkably similar to those promoted in current education reform agendas" (p. 1). Therefore, one might conclude that Aboriginal students are experiencing more success in the education system today. However, according to Estrin and Nelson-Barber, "the opposite is true" (p. 1). Instead, they maintained that there remains a definite contrast and conflict in expectations between the home and school life of Aboriginal children. They emphasized that this contrast and conflict is even more applicable to Aboriginal students "who live in traditional communities" (p. 2).

Alluding to perceptions of Aboriginal parenting customs, Pepper and Henry (1986) claimed that "child rearing practices have been labelled by traditional European standards as permissive" (p. 55). However, they argued that these perceptions are not accurate in that Aboriginal "child-rearing is self-exploratory rather than restrictive" (p. 55). They further revealed that, at home, Aboriginal children "are trained to be self-directed and self-reliant, by having the freedom to make many of their own choices and decisions" (p. 55). Whyte (1986) stated that in the majority of Aboriginal cultures, "the social situations outside the home are never directed or controlled by a single individual who acts in supreme authority" (p. 6). He further pointed out that, traditionally, Aboriginal children "learn early to make decisions and assume responsibility for their own actions" (p. 6).

In light of the above reflections, it is easy to conclude that there are distinct contrasts in "fit" between traditional Aboriginal practices and those found in the vast majority of Canada's schools.

This segment introduced aspects of Aboriginal culture and history. What follows is an elaboration of the literature recounting the impact of the initial European influence over Aboriginal education.

Early Aboriginal Education

Atleo (1991) reported differences in perspective between Aboriginal and European peoples dating back to the arrival of the European settlers in the 1600s. He stated that, "for the most part, the Indian population accepted the new arrival at face value, while the Europeans assumed the superiority of their culture over that of any Indian peoples" (p. 2). Furthermore, he maintained that "out of that misconception grew the European conviction that in order for the Indians to survive, they would have to be assimilated into the European social order" (p. 2).

According to Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas (1990), "The innovations and successes of Native ... culture consistently have been denigrated and denied" (p. 129). Atleo (1991) presented the reflections of a Jesuit missionary, who in 1632 wrote: "Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of weaning them from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirements of the language, arts, and customs of civilized life" (p. 2).

In response, Atleo (1991) asserted that this antiquated statement was "the very antithesis of sound educational theory and practice today" (p. 2). In addition, he reported the success rate of Aboriginal children in the early education era at "about one out of every hundred. Alternatively, it may be said that the rate of failure in early Native education began at 99%" (p. 3).

As a result of the historical residential- or boarding-school approach to early Aboriginal education, Atleo (1991) indicated that there has been "a lot of attention recently focusing upon the abuse suffered by Native students at these schools" (p. 4). He concluded that Aboriginal people are "still reeling from the effects of education policy first conceived and penned during the 1600s" (p. 4). This was supported by Timpson (1995), who maintained that prior to the 1970s, the negative repercussions inflicted upon Aboriginal children at the hands of many residential schools "were well beyond the capacity of the child welfare system to handle" (p. 535). Equally sobering is Timpson's reminder that issues related to the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal people has been taken seriously by researchers and other academics only since the mid-1980s.

The following segment examines the literature related to more current aspects of Aboriginal education.

Recent History of Aboriginal Education

Given the history of disrespect shown to the Aboriginal peoples by the mainstream culture, "it is not unexpected that many Native[s] ... view Whites with suspicion and even hostility" (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990, p. 128). They further reflected that, although Aboriginal people comprise only a small minority of our population,

> they are burdened with a disproportionate share of social and economic problems. They are often caught between two cultures; their own historical ...

> culture has been oppressed, often violently, by a dominant culture that has consistently devalued and ignored the[ir] achievements,... glorifying instead the ideal of cultural assimilation.... And yet, because of the confiscation of their lands,... [they] must in some way depend on the dominant culture for the provision of basic life necessities while often feeling in conflict with the values and models of success of that culture. (pp. 131-132)

Moreover, the pressure to adopt the values of the dominant culture is applied especially on Aboriginal people "who have been raised in White, middle-class environments" (p. 129).

Atleo (1991) described a 1986 study that tracked the experiences of Aboriginal people enrolled in a residential school at Blue Quills, near St. Paul, Alberta, between 1931 and 1970. According to Atleo, analysis of this study indicated that the consequences of this form of Aboriginal education was consistent over the period of time. He claimed that Aboriginal children "kept failing and running away from school" (p. 4). Hawthorn (1967) reflected on the imperfections associated with contemporary approaches to Aboriginal education:

> It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing. Third, in both segregated and integrated schools, one of the main aims teachers expressed with reference to Indians is "to help them improve their standard of living, or their general lot, or themselves" which is another way of saying that what they are and have now is not good enough; they must do and be other things. (p. 142)

In a similar vein, Whyte (1986) observed that

> the rich cultural contributions of Indian and Métis have been conspicuously omitted. The Indian and Métis youth have been subjected to textbooks, movies, and teacher attitudes which ignored the dignity and worth of Indian people and tended to disgrace them in terms of past history. The Indian and Métis are either portrayed as: the Noble Savage, proud Indian walking with dignity resplendent in buckskin and feathers; the Ignoble Savage, vicious, violent Indian full of guile and deceit; or a victim, drunken, beaten, homeless, and helpless. (p. 14)

According to Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), "In the relatively recent past, common practices of many schools have either directly or indirectly devalued Native ways of life" (p. 1). Furthermore, they claimed that only a few decades ago "such practices [as] ... cutting students' hair without consent, physically punishing students for using their Native languages, forcing the study and practice of Christianity against parents' wishes and in general, excising from children's lives anything connotating 'Indianness' [occurred]" (p. 1).

In response, Heit (1993) maintained that "when First Nations students see *themselves* -- their histories and traditions -- reflected and valued in the schools they attend and in the curriculum they are taught, they may be more motivated to learn and to enjoy school" (p. 6). With this in mind, what follows is a look at how the situation is improving.

Recent Thoughts and Developments

Attempting to summarize many of the recent developments in Aboriginal education, Atleo (1991) stated that "although the behavior of the Native students remains essentially the same over time, the relationship between the Native and Euro-Canadian [people] has radically altered in social, political, and economic terms" (p. 5). For example, the *Policy Statement on Native Education in Alberta* document produced by Alberta Education (1987b) presented the Alberta government's reaction to the concerns voiced by the province's Aboriginal population. As well, this document outlines "the actions Alberta Education has taken and will take to address the needs of Native students and their communities" (p. 2). Furthermore, this Alberta Education document claimed that this policy "provides opportunities for all students in schools throughout Alberta to develop an awareness and appreciation of Native cultures and their many contributions to society" (p. 2).

This section has explored the literature as it relates to the culture and history of Aboriginal peoples, including an examination of early and more recent approaches to the education of Aboriginal peoples as well as impacts that these approaches have had on them.

Learning Styles

This section of the literature review considers learning styles and the relevance of learning styles to

Aboriginal education. The section begins with an overview of learning styles, then focuses on the impact of culture on learning styles, and concludes with an elaboration of Aboriginal learning styles and learning preferences.

Learning styles, according to Johnson and Ramirez (1990), "reflect how people perceive their environment, how they receive and interpret information, and how they categorize or organize it" (p. 9). Further, learning styles reveal students' "individual preferences as to how they are instructed, and thus how they learn" (p. 9). In addition, learning styles are an outcome of childrens' "reference or social group and their prior experiences" (p. 9).

Irvine and York (1995) explained that "the concept of learning styles is based on the theory that an individual responds to educational experiences with consistent behavior and performance patterns" (p. 484). They elaborated that the phrase *learning styles* encompasses cognitive, affective, and physiological dimensions:

> The division of learning styles into cognitive styles, affective styles, and physiological styles serves both to differentiate and to specify related research. Cognitive-styles research, for example, focuses on how learners prefer to receive and process information and experiences, how they create concepts, and how they retain and retrieve information. Affective-styles research, in contrast, emphasizes differences in interpersonal skills and self-perception, curiosity, attention, motivation, arousal, and persistence. Finally, physiological-styles research measures how gender, circadian rhythms, nutrition, and general health impact learning processes. (p. 484)

In a similar vein, Griggs (1985) described learning styles as "the manner in which different elements from five basic stimuli affect a person's ability to perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (p. 202). She delineated the five stimuli as follows:

> (a) environmental stimulus (light, sound, temperature, design), (b) emotional stimulus (structure, persistence, motivation, responsibility), (c) sociological stimulus (pairs, peers, adults, self, group, varied), (d) physical stimulus (perceptual strengths -- auditory, visual, tactual, kinesthetic mobility, intake, time of day, including morning versus evening, late morning, and afternoon), (e) psychological stimulus (global or analytic, impulsive or reflective, and cerebral dominance). (p. 202)

Referring to teaching, Johnson and Ramirez (1990) maintained that "educators must be made aware that students exhibit diverse cognitive and learning styles" (p. 9). Furthermore, "teachers should not attempt to change students' orientation. They should respect cognitive and learning style differences, as these are a product of family and community socialization practices" (p. 11).

McCaig (1993) suggested that if teachers were to accommodate the "various learning styles of their students, perhaps some of the difficulties would be alleviated and students could achieve greater success in learning" (p. 17). Similarly, Johnson and Ramirez (1990) stressed that when students encounter difficulty learning, "it is important to consider whether they are experiencing difficulty because

they do not conform to teachers' norms or expectations" (p. 9).

It would seem inconceivable to assume a full understanding of learning styles without considering the influence of culture. This is examined in the next segment.

Cultural Influences on Learning Styles

In order to accommodate differences in learning styles, Johnson and Ramirez (1990) maintained that teachers must have an "understanding [of] the characteristics of the child's reference group, including language, customs, traditions, religion, family, and attitudes" (p. 12). They further emphasized the importance of teachers familiarizing themselves with their students' backgrounds in order to evolve "accurate interpretations of individual behavior" (p. 12).

Describing the relationship between culture and learning styles, Irvine and York (1995) shared five culturally influenced factors that appear to affect learning:

> [a] *Childhood socialization:*... the child-rearing practices of a particular culture;... [b] *socio-cultural tightness:*... time orientation, social roles, interpersonal relations, reasoning, verbal messages, and social organization;... [c] *ecological adaptation:*... for example, some cultures depend on highly developed perceptual skills for survival in their environment;... [d] *biological effects:*... such factors as nutrition, physical development, and brain development;... [e] *language:*... Students who are not native speakers encounter barriers in school because their language is not valued and is

> perceived as a cultural deficit rather than an asset. (pp. 489-490)

Challenges encountered with learning-styles research. According to Irvine and York (1995), "The cultural influence on learning styles is mediated by such additional factors as social class and gender" (p. 492). As well, "it appears that culture and ethnicity are frameworks for the development of learning styles preferences.... However, other factors can play a significant role in changing and modifying initial cultural predilections" (p. 492). In a similar vein, Banks (1988; as cited in Banks, 1995) concluded that the impact of social status and culture on student-learning styles is "a complex one, and that class mobility mediates but does not eliminate the effects of ethnic culture on ... learning characteristics" (p. 16).

Another challenge associated with learning-styles research, according to Johnson and Ramirez (1990), is that "much of the literature which describes minority individuals reinforces existing stereotypes" (p. 12). Moreover, "when teachers follow ... stereotypes in selecting instructional strategies, incompatibilities between teaching and learning styles result" (p. 12). Similarly, Irvine and York (1995) warned that "negative teacher expectations can be fuelled if teachers incorporate generalized and decontextualized observations ... without knowledge of the limitations of learning style labels" (p. 492). Wilgosh and Mulcahy (1993)

cautioned that "educators must not lose sight of individual differences, rather than focusing on group characteristics (e.g., learning style) that can lead to stereotyping and discriminatory practices" (p. 131).

In response, Banks (1995) suggested that the optimal process that one should employ in attempting to understand learning characteristics of students of varied cultural backgrounds would be "to observe and describe them in ethnographic studies, rather than classifying them into several brief categories" (p. 16). Johnson and Ramirez (1990) lent support through their claim that "there is no one set of characteristics that can be ascribed to all members of any ethnic group" (1990, p. 12). Furthermore, "culture exists on a continuum, with individuals demonstrating traits which range from those traditionally attributed to the ethnic group to those that are descriptive of a minority individual who has been totally assimilated into the majority culture" (p. 12).

Reflecting on the above, one may conclude that there is indeed a link between culture and learning preferences which has resulted in definite challenges associated with this research. With this in mind, the next section examines learning-styles research specific to Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal Learning Style

Widespread conclusions have been presented in the literature supporting the existence of an Aboriginal

learning style (Browne, 1990; Irvine & York, 1995; More, 1993; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Whyte, 1986; Wilgosh & Mulcahy, 1993). According to Pepper and Henry (1986),

> There is a growing body of research to suggest that the distinctively different child-rearing practices -- one stressing observational learning and another emphasizing learning through verbalization -- has fostered the development of very different styles of learning among Indian and European-American children. (p. 57)

On the other hand, some of the literature refuted or, at most, cautiously acknowledged the existence of an Aboriginal learning style (Kleinfeld, 1975, 1979; Kleinfeld & Nelson, 1991; Larose, 1991; Sawyer, 1991). Larose pointed out that "if there are any behavioral learning styles related to specific Native enculturative patterns, they vary at the individual and group level" (p. 82). As well, Kleinfeld and Nelson stated that "virtually no research has succeeded in demonstrating that instruction adapted to Native Americans' visual learning style results in greater learning" (p. 273). In response, Banks (1995) argued that the conclusions of Kleinfeld and Nelson "do not constitute a sufficient reason to abandon the [Aboriginal] learning style paradigm" (p. 16). However, he conceded that the issue is "a contentious one" (p. 16).

Furthermore, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) emphasized the complexity of this issue through their claim that Aboriginal students' "orientation to the types of learning, knowledge and ways of thinking and doing valued by their

community is not just an individual psychological process. It is also a multilayered social process" (p. 2).

Johnson and Ramirez (1990) presented the same viewpoint when they suggested that "what is culturally appropriate depends on where the child is on the continuum of culture (i.e., whether the child is traditional, dualistic, or atraditional)" (p. 14). They defined these characteristics as follows:

> *Traditional cultures*.... The family is the most critical unit in these communities, and children are taught that they are representatives of the family first and individuals second. All family members, including the extended family, participate in child rearing, monitor behavior of children, and provide feedback to parents.... The child from a traditional community has a strong ethnic identity in that these communities are, for the most part, segregated (e.g., reservation, barrio, etc.), with the majority of the residents being members of the same ethnic group. Thus, there are continuous opportunities for students to learn the customs, traditions, and language of the cultural group.
> *Dualistic cultures*. In the dualistic community, the customs of the ethnic group are modified because of interactions with members of the majority culture, but a distinctive set of values continues to be nurtured by the family and the community.... The child reflects the influence of the interacting cultures.... The individual becomes dualistic, that is, able to conform to the norms and expectations of the family, as well as to adapt to the norms and expectations of society at large.
> *Atraditional culture*. In the atraditional community, ethnic group members are in the minority, and thus offspring reflect the culture of the white, middle class. Because the culture is not reflected in the community, the individual may not have a strong ethnic identity or may reject that identity.
> (pp. 13-14, italics added)

Urban Aboriginal children, for the most part, would be either dualistic or atraditional, or somewhere in between the two.

Characteristics of the Aboriginal learning style. In reference to the existence of an Aboriginal learning style, Pepper and Henry (1986) advised that "the determination that an Indian ... learning style exists may be harmful due to the danger of stereotyping" (p. 58). Further, they emphasized that there "is no *absolute* Indian ... learning style" (p. 58). However, with respect to Aboriginal and non-Native children, they stressed that "a wide variety of individual differences have been identified" (p. 58).

Aboriginal students, according to Irvine and York (1995), tend to display learning characteristics that identify them as "field-dependent learners" (p. 484). They described field-dependent behaviors that include "high levels of impulsivity, low reflectivity, and reliance on the social environment and on authority figures" (p. 487). In addition, "field-dependent persons prefer to work with people rather than in isolation and tend to conform to the prevailing social context" (p. 487). In a similar vein, Whyte (1986) found evidence of an Aboriginal learning style "drawn from several ethnographic sources and from a host of intelligence tests which have led researchers to conclude the cognitive style of Indian peoples is perceptual, figural, spatial, and visual" (p. 12).

According to Irvine and York (1995), Aboriginal children

> Prefer visual, spatial, and perceptual information rather than verbal;...
> use mental images to remember and understand words and concepts rather than word associations;
> watch and then do rather than employ trial and error;
> have well-formed spatial ability;
> learn best from nonverbal mechanisms rather than verbal;
> learn experientially and in natural settings;
> have a generalist orientation, interested in people and things;
> value conciseness of speech, slightly varied intonation, and limited vocal range;
> prefer small-group work;
> favor holistic presentations and visual representations. (pp. 490-491)

Pepper and Henry (1986) discussed the following eight learning preferences of Aboriginal students:

1. They are skilled in non-verbal communication.
2. They are less skilled and have a low frequency in verbal coding.
3. They are skilled and have a high frequency in processing visual and spatial information.
4. They are skilled and have a high frequency in holistic processing on both verbal and non-verbal tasks (i.e., are able to see the *whole* versus the parts).
5. They have relative strength and high frequency in imaginal coding.
6. They use a "community learning style." The child observes carefully over a long period of time followed by practice of the process (direct experience), with a minimum of verbal preparation or interchange -- (takes longer).
7. They are group-oriented and prefer to work in small groups.
8. They prefer an informal setting with freedom of movement. (p. 58)

In a similar vein, More (1993) wrote that Aboriginal students "are more likely to have strengths towards the

global, imaginal, reflective and concrete ends of the dimensions [of learning styles]" (p. 10). Moreover, "the more traditional the community, the more likely the child will show this profile" (p. 10). He described the "dimensions" as follows:

> *global*:... The student tends to understand best when the overall concept is presented first;... *imaginal*:... [The student tends] to learn better from images, symbols and diagrams. The more imaginal learner remembers better if the coding uses images, and uses images to regulate behavior;... [and] *reflective*:... [The student tends] to completely think through the new learning before using it. (pp. 4-5, italics added)

He did not elaborate on the concrete dimension. Instead, More concluded that "this dimension needs little explanation" (p. 5).

An informal survey conducted by the Manager of Division Monitoring of Edmonton Catholic Schools (personal communication, September, 1997) revealed that Aboriginal students in that district achieved higher nonverbal scores on the 1997 Canadian Test of Basic Skills than non-Native students did. This would appear to corroborate much of the literature presented in this segment. However, full understanding is impossible without also considering the connection between learning styles and teaching styles.

Teaching Styles

In 1987 Alberta Education released a report summarizing a consensus of viewpoints held by Aboriginal people in Alberta. This report advised that all teachers of Aboriginal

children "receive pre-service and/or inservice [education] relative to Native cultures" (1987a, p. 19). As well, it was suggested that inservice education "is also needed in preferred instructional methods for Native students" (p. 19).

However, Kleinfeld (1992) cautioned that because of the limitations of the research on learning styles, it would be inappropriate to conclude that there is a specific teaching style that is effective with Aboriginal children. Nevertheless, Kleinfeld, Williamson-McDiarmid, Grubis, and Parrett (1983) stated that "fundamentally, effective teachers are believed to adopt a culturally congruent teaching style -- entering into the communicative styles of Native communities, emphasizing Native cultural materials in the classroom, and basing classroom life on Native ... value patterns" (p. 90).

According to Irvine and York (1995), "The closer the match between a student's learning style and the teacher's instructional methods, the more likely the student will experience academic success" (p. 491). They also stressed that

> Indian students bring to the school setting a distinctive set of cultural forms and behaviors, including their group's history, language, values, norms, rituals and symbols.... [Therefore,] it must be emphasized that effective teachers of these students must contextualize the teaching act, giving attention to their students' cultural norms, behaviors, and experiences. (p. 494)

In light of this, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) emphasized that, to interpret a student's performance on a given task,

> one must consider how the demands of the task intersect with his or her own ways of knowing, approach to problem-solving, etc.... [Furthermore,] inadequate performance on a task does not necessarily imply lack of competence, particularly when the task is not culturally congruent. (p. 3)

This segment of the chapter provided an overview of the importance of matching teaching styles with the learning preferences of students. What follows is an examination of the literature pertaining to the influence of the learning atmosphere.

Classroom Environment

McAlpine and Crago (1995) claimed that "school success is limited by the degree to which students experience classroom interaction that is similar or continuous with the notions of communication they have learned in their families and communities" (p. 404). Referring to Aboriginal education, Atleo (1991) wrote that

> education takes place in, and is affected by, a context of conditions both external and internal to education.... [Moreover,] the external factors assumed to affect student achievement are the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions while the internal factors assumed to affect student achievement are curriculum and education personnel. (p. 6)

From this, Atleo concluded that the crucial element for a constructive metamorphosis between external and internal

factors depends on a "stance between the Native and non-Native characterized by mutual respect" (p. 8).

According to Kleinfeld (1972, 1975), a combination of personal warmth and high expectations is essential for teachers of Aboriginal children. She further suggested that effective teachers of Aboriginal children foster personal relationships with their students, while at the same time holding high expectations for them. Wilson (1994) also emphasized the importance of positive relationships between Aboriginal students and their teachers. In a similar vein, Fisher and Sellens (1974; as cited in Whyte, 1986) affirmed that

> those teachers who succeeded in eliciting a high level of ... participation from Native students tended to respond to them with an intense personal warmth rather than a professional distance. Teachers communicated such feelings by developing friendships with students outside the classroom in ways that some who hold a narrow view of the teacher's professional role might consider inappropriate. Teachers communicated personal warmth within the classroom in large part through nonverbal messages of smiling, close body distance, and touch. (pp. 4-5)

Gilland (1988) stressed that teachers of Aboriginal children must concentrate their efforts toward addressing students' self-concept weaknesses or voids before they can expect their students to strive for academic achievement. Turner-Laliberte (1993) described an Aboriginal education program offered through the Prince Albert School Division that is "directed at young teenagers who have negative

attitudes, poor self-concepts, and who appear at risk of leaving school" (p. 3).

This segment detailed characteristics of the climate of the classroom. Next, the preferred attributes of educators of Aboriginal children are explored.

Teacher Characteristics

According to Van Ness (1982), teachers of Aboriginal students often exercise authority in ways incongruent with the values of Aboriginal people. Similarly, Whyte (1986) claimed that "school personnel and curricula are frequently characterized by attributes such as self-expression, aggressiveness and working for personal advantage, which run counter to the value placed by most Indian[s] ... on cooperation, group well-being and, when appropriate, silence" (p. 1).

For the most part, Canadian educators apply an analytic and auditory approach to teaching children (McCaig, 1993). However, "many children do not learn from this method but have a more global approach to learning" (p. 17). Referring to teaching Aboriginal children, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) stated that "reliance on questioning or recitation for both instruction and assessment is incongruous with cultural norms" (p. 3). Pepper and Henry (1986) presented the same viewpoint when they suggested that Aboriginal students align more with observation or visual means of instruction.

Emphasis on implementing democratic classroom practices with respect to teaching Aboriginal children is paramount (Pepper & Henry, 1986). In observing teachers who themselves were Aboriginal, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) found that these teachers "tended to structure classrooms so children learned from each other as well as from the teacher" (p. 3). In support, Irvine and York (1995) remarked that for culturally diverse students, the use of cooperative learning groups "is one of the techniques most often recommended" (p. 491).

Describing the teaching of language skills to Aboriginal students, Turner-Laliberte (1993) argued the importance of teachers "surround[ing] the students with language and good models in a supportive environment" (p. 13). Similarly, recounting the teaching practices of Inuit teachers in northern Quebec, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) found that these teachers used "adapted classroom discourse practices to harmonize with their students' communication patterns" (p. 3). For example, "rather than asking individual students to answer questions, teachers allowed the whole group to call out answers" (p. 3). This is profound in that in Aboriginal culture "it is the norm to speak to the group as a whole rather than addressing a comment or posing a question to an individual" (p. 2). Furthermore, the Inuit teachers avoided immediate reactions to the group's responses. Instead, "they gave indirect

feedback through the ways in which they continued the discussion" (p. 3).

Irvine and York (1995) recommended that teachers of Aboriginal children "avoid highlighting individual students' success, accept silence, reduce lecturing, de-emphasize competition, use personal teaching styles, allow longer pauses after questions, use whole-language approaches to language instruction, and use minimal teacher directions" (p. 491). In a similar vein, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) maintained that successful teachers of Aboriginal children refrain from wielding "any overt social control, choosing instead to share control with their students, who had great latitude to interact with peers" (p. 3).

According to Whyte (1986), "Observations and reports ... have allowed a synthesis of tentative conclusions concerning the classroom setting and program planning which can enhance the learning of Indian ... students" (p. 5). He summarized these strategies as follows:

1. [The teacher should encourage] an open classroom environment as opposed to a more structured traditional classroom setting....
2. The teacher should act as an equal to his or her student, rather than as a supreme authority.
3. Formal lecturing to the class as a whole should be kept to a minimum. Conversations which are highly structured and centered around the teacher; initiated dialogue should be kept to a minimum.
4. There is a need for more pupil-centered teaching practices which encourage student initiative and responsibility for learning.

5. The teacher should interact with the children in small groups so that the individual children are not placed in a competitive situation in front of the whole class. The situation where a child is singled out from a large group and asked to reply verbally to questions or perform other tasks should be definitely avoided.
6. Teachers should not ask the child to demonstrate knowledge or skill in the essence of others until the student has acquired an acceptable recognized level of competence. (pp. 16-17)

While recognizing the importance of both the personal qualities and pedagogical awareness of educators of Aboriginal students, educators must also consider assessing and measuring the achievement of Aboriginal students. These realms are highlighted in the next segment.

Assessment of Aboriginal Students

As a result of an examination of assessment and achievement of Aboriginal children, Wilgosh and Mulcahy (1993) found that "inappropriateness and inadequacy of assessment instruments normed on the majority population is demonstrated for [Aboriginal] learners" (p. 129). Furthermore, "bias in favor of the majority culture ... has been identified as leading to low academic achievement of Native students" (p. 129). Kleinfeld, Williamson-McDiarmid, Grubis, and Parrett (1983) concurred with this statement with respect to such norm-referenced tests as intelligence tests. However, they add, "in our view, the cultural inappropriateness issue is a red herring when we are talking about achievement tests in school subjects" (pp. 91-92).

Nevertheless, referring to standardized tests, Persi and Brunatti (1987) argued that "the different fund of knowledge acquired by ... Native children is relatively unmeasured by such tests" (p. 15). According to Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), to date "there is no repertoire of standardized tests in Native languages or that draw on Native cultural content and learning processes" (p. 4).

Alberta Education (1987a) presented a similar viewpoint with their recommendation that "support should be given for the research and development of culture free psychological, diagnostic, and achievement tests" (p. 20). Further, in another Alberta Education document (1987b), a commitment was made to provide "assistance to school boards for assessing and interpreting accurately the standardized tests written by Native students" (p. 7).

Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) suggested that, ideally, assessment of Aboriginal children should be "embedded in or continuous with instruction" (p. 3). They defended this claim with their contention that "assessment tools that artificially isolate disparate bits of information -- as do most multiple choice tests, for example -- are not compatible with Native ways of demonstrating understanding or skill (p. 3). In a similar vein, Wilgosh and Mulcahy (1993) stated that student assessment "should emphasize cognitive processes underlying learning, and should be individualized much more than is done at present"

(p. 132). Further, "rather than analysing scores attained on standardized tests, the strategies, or processes, that the individual has used ... should be evaluated" (p. 132).

Based on the literature reviewed and my own experience as a principal of an Aboriginal school, I concur with the assertions of both Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) and Wilgosh and Mulcahy (1993). Unfortunately, however, Aboriginal students in Western Canada continue to be assessed using standardized tests such as provincial achievement tests and provincial diploma examinations.

Characteristics of Non-Native Teachers of Aboriginal Students

Rosin (1993) asserted,

> It appears that the "white man" has been trying to civilize the Native people, to conform to white man's values, beliefs, customs, institutions, etc., for over 400 years and has failed to recognize the difference and uniqueness within Native culture. (p. 66)

Referring to an ethnographic study of Canadian Sioux Indian students conducted in 1988, Wilson (1991) concluded that "many times, even before the teachers knew the students, they prejudged them" (p. 379). Moreover, "they could not have imagined that these students would ever be successful" (p. 379). Elaborating, Corson (1991) asserted that

> sometimes teachers are so affected by their own acute sense of failure with children from certain backgrounds, or by their apparent success with others, that they perceive the backgrounds that failing children come from with a prejudiced or ironic view: they see those backgrounds as a deficit

> environment that is lacking some ingredient necessary for the children to succeed in school. (p. 10)

In an Alberta Education (1987a) survey, over 4,000 Aboriginal people in the province were consulted. A recurring theme throughout this consultation process was the opinion that many teachers were not aware of the unique culture that Aboriginal students in the province's schools represent. Further, many Aboriginal people felt that this lack of cultural consciousness "causes many teachers to lack tolerance and understanding of the attitudes and behavior of Native students" (p. 19). Another Alberta Education document (1987b) emphasized that teachers of Aboriginal children "should be aware of and understand just how their students live and think so that they can better assist them to reach their potential" (p. 6).

According to Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987), "The reason for the surprising lack of awareness of the need for deeper cross-cultural understanding may be that the majority of well-educated people have a 'passive' understanding of other cultures and subcultures that gives them the feeling that they know the other cultures" (p. 2). In response, Warnica (1986), reporting on "the many difficulties associated with Native education in [Lethbridge] city schools" (p. 37), used as a reference a task force on Aboriginal education in Lethbridge to recommend that course work in Aboriginal

education be "a prerequisite for the Bachelor of Education Degree" (p. 39).

Literature pertaining to cultural conflict experienced by educators of students of nonmainstream cultures is reviewed in the next segment.

Cultural Conflict

McAlpine and Crago (1995) wrote:

> If one looks at the population of Canada (and other Western nations),... there have been dramatic shifts in the make-up of the population, from monocultural to multi-cultural, in the past two decades.... [However,] teacher educators and applicants for teacher education continue to be drawn from the dominant society.... [Furthermore,] although at one time it was perhaps not inappropriate for new teachers to begin with the assumption that their students' identities were similar to their own,... teachers today need to disabuse themselves from this idea. (p. 414)

As well, Avery and Walker (1993) stressed that "teachers who have not had the opportunity to develop their awareness, knowledge, and skills at working with diverse populations will be inadequately prepared to meet the classrooms of a diverse society" (p. 28). Similarly, Wayson and Pinnell (1977; as cited in Avery & Walker, 1993) confirmed that "educators' own childhood, professional preparation, and career experiences give them a view of themselves, the world, and their profession that prevents them from comprehending both the essential strengths of minority children and the reforms necessary for educating them" (p. 29).

Several challenges associated with teaching in racially segregated schools have been identified by Brownell and Smith (1993). They determined that "general education teachers who were racially different from their students [were at] the greatest attrition risk" (p. 273). Further, they claimed that teachers bring to a school their personal and professional values, beliefs, and outlooks. Consequently, how a school's climate aligns with these values, beliefs, and outlooks may have a substantial effect on one's perceptions of effectiveness and success as a teacher.

According to Corson (1991), "When teachers judge a pupil's cultural background against the yardstick of their own categories about what constitutes 'quality' in educational performance, that cultural background can become an inaccurate indicator of children's educational potential" (p. 12). He further concluded that "when majority culture educators look at minority children they tend to focus on what those children lack" (p. 28). As a result, "this lack becomes the focus of the schooling that they offer those children" (p. 28). Moreover, Carr and Klassen (1997) said that teachers, "by placing more importance on behavior than academic work, adversely affect racial minority children, who may not act in conformity with the teacher's culture" (p. 69).

Because this study was delimited to examining issues specific to urban Aboriginal education, one would assume that the effects of demographic isolation are not necessarily relevant. However, isolation has been identified to be a definite component of cultural conflict experienced by educators of Aboriginal students and is therefore described in brief in the next segment.

Feelings of Isolation

Borys, Wilgosh, Lefebvre, Kisilevich, Samiroden, Olson, and Ware (1991) conducted a study of school and university partnerships in the Fort Vermilion School Division, which is located in northern Alberta. At the time of the study, "the division was experiencing a crisis in hiring teachers" (p. 5). They reported that "only three of 25 U[niversity] of A[lberta] education students offered contracts ... had accepted" (p. 5). Furthermore, "56 teachers, many from other provinces who became homesick, left the division" (p. 5). One can assume, therefore, that because the Fort Vermilion School Division is situated in an isolated area of the province, the lack of success in procuring long-term staff may well be attributable to the trepidation which results from the feelings of isolation experienced by recent teacher graduates. The trepidation is described next.

Johnson (1983) observed that teachers who are placed in isolated, rural settings are "subject to a set of personal and professional frustrations which center around their

frequently expressed feelings of inadequacy and isolation" (p. 10). She further stated:

> Personally, [teachers] find themselves in new and very foreign surroundings, isolated from familiar cultural components.... New teachers frequently report being lonesome, not being able to successfully separate their personal from their professional lives, lacking in privacy and exhausted because of spending valuable energy learning to adapt to the cultural requirements of the new community in addition to preparation for teaching. (p. 10)

In a similar vein, Kleinfeld, Williamson-McDiarmid, Grubis, and Parrett (1983) claimed that teaching Aboriginal students in isolated, rural situations

> presents unusual challenges. Teachers must cope, often for the first time, with the experience of being a minority person, of being a symbol of a resented majority culture. Teachers must figure out how to survive materially in a remote village -- their housing may be a one room cabin, they may have to cut wood for fuel and pack water from the village well, they may have to use a "honeybucket" for a toilet. Teachers must learn how to manage classrooms where they have to teach students spanning several grade levels and where they must teach subjects that they were never trained in. (p. 88)

These conclusions are profound in that, in Western Canada, there is a high likelihood that recent teacher graduates will receive their first teaching positions in either remote school systems or band-operated schools. Therefore, preparation for, or at least exposure to isolation, should occur in teacher-education programs.

This section provided a review of the literature pertaining to issues specific to the trials and tribulations confronting non-Native educators of Aboriginal students. The

next section details ways of averting, or at least, reducing these complications.

Factors and Strategies Influencing Teaching Success

Warnica (1986) emphasized the need to "make opportunities available to teachers to assist them in becoming more aware of Native history and culture" (p. 39). Further, he stressed the importance of providing teachers of Aboriginal children "with specific teaching strategies to deal with children of different cultures" (p. 39). A document produced by the Department of Education (1990) in Washington, DC, described a program offered in New Mexico that "provides a cultural orientation for every new teacher ... and allows them to meet once a month with an experienced teacher" (p. 6). The document highlights another example, the Navajo Community College in Tsaili, Arizona, a teachers' college that requires teachers to participate in tours to become familiar with the Navajo people. It was anticipated that "these experiences should help decrease the culture shock often felt by teachers" (p. 6).

From an Alberta perspective, Warnica (1986) proposed that school districts "establish cultural exchange programs between city and reserve teachers and students in such activities as ... teacher/student exchanges" (p. 39). As well, Mendenhall (1982) suggested that ongoing "staff development should include in-service training ... on bicultural matters" (p. 91). In addition, "the use of Native

resource people can help provide a balanced perspective during these in-service orientation sessions" (p. 91).

This section of the literature review has presented suggestions for lessening the culture shock experienced by educators of Aboriginal students. The following section provides a synopsis of challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal students resulting from a perceived lack of student contentment, achievement, and, ultimately, success.

Stressors and Difficulties of Teachers of Aboriginal Children

Hawthorn (1967) conducted a survey of Aboriginal education in Canada that revealed that mainstream education philosophies alienate Aboriginal children because they are incongruent with Aboriginal cultural values. As a result, teachers of Aboriginal children may experience difficulty if they expect these children to conform fully to non-Native values. Reflecting on possible reasons for lower educational outcomes experienced by Aboriginal students, Carr and Klassen (1997) asserted that "a number of factors ... explain the low educational outcomes or underperformance of some groups in schools: the formal -- as well as the hidden -- curriculum, involvement of parents, teacher effectiveness, beliefs of minority groups, and school culture" (p. 68).

Wilson (1991) remarked that

> the overwhelming frustration and isolation of [Aboriginal] students affects their academic performance. During this period of trauma, students feel abandoned. They skip classes to seek support.... They question their own abilities.... Some become involved in fights and their grades drop, and some appear apathetic. (p. 379)

Similarly, I observed that teachers who neglect to nurture the self-concept of Aboriginal children and instead concentrate on stressing curriculum expectations may experience high degrees of job-related stress if they feel that they are trying to "push a rope" because of a perceived lack of cooperation and interest from their students (Danyluk, 1996). Teachers may feel increased stress and decreased feelings of effectiveness because of their inadvertently ineffective teaching methods, which are rejected by their students. In response, Irvine and York (1995) recommended that "teacher[s] ... probe the school, community, and home environments in a search for insights into diverse students' abilities, preferences, motivations, and learning approaches" (p. 494).

The next section considers the literature reviewed throughout this chapter and the insights of the researcher, and provides the conceptual framework that guided this research.

Conceptual Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework illustrates, "either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied -- the key factors,

constructs or variables -- and the presumed relationship among them" (p. 18). The conceptual framework that directed this study was constructed using various components of the literature review as a foundation.

This study was conceived as an interpretivistic, descriptive case study that explored challenges encountered by educators of urban Aboriginal children. These challenges, as well as strategies that educators evolved to address them, were identified through the review of the literature and my personal experience as a principal of an Aboriginal school.

Central to the conceptual framework was the need to identify challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children in an urban setting. The conceptual framework was therefore constructed examining various influences on those challenges. From the literature as well as my personal experience, I was able to identify factors that appear to have an effect on the central theme of this study. The conceptualization of how this might materialize is presented in Figure 2.1. What follows is the rationale for this conceptualization.

The literature review indicated that challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal students are directly influenced by both educators and students. Non-Native educators are affected by doctrines of the mainstream or

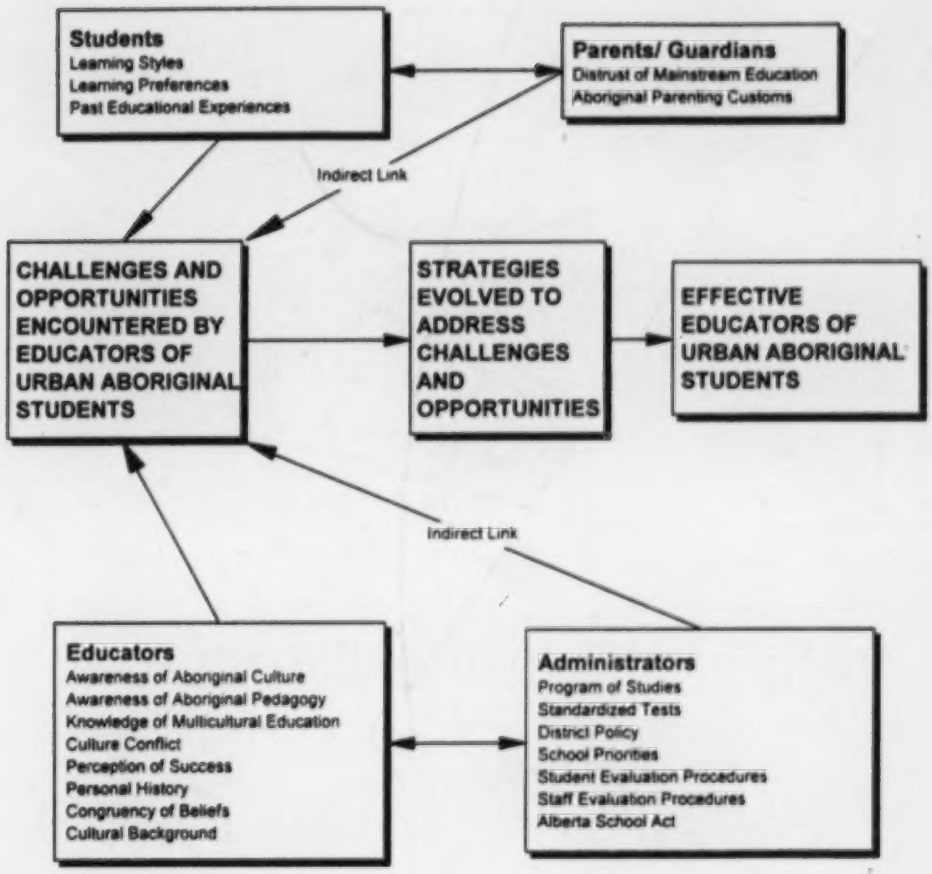

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework.

majority culture. Aboriginal educators, through their teacher education training as well as through involvement with mainstream education systems, boards, departments of education, and so on, are also influenced by the precepts of the mainstream or majority culture.

A relationship was evident between the challenges experienced and educators' awareness and understanding of such factors as multicultural education issues and Aboriginal culture, pedagogy, personal beliefs, and histories. Further, a connection was found between educators and administrative dictates that place policy, curriculum, and evaluation restrictions upon them. Many of these dictates have an impact on the challenges.

As the literature revealed, culture directly influences both Aboriginal students and their parents/guardians. There is also an interplay between these two groups. The literature revealed unique ways in which Aboriginal children learn, as well as preferred teaching styles that align with these learning preferences.

Educators of Aboriginal children therefore should be cognizant of these aspects to serve the educational needs of these children better. Figure 2.1 depicts one way in which this might be conceptualized.

Summary

The literature relating to multicultural and intercultural education in general, and Aboriginal education in particular, stressed the need for educator awareness of cultural differences. More important, however, was the notion that teachers of ethnically diverse children must understand that these children do not always respond well to conventional, Euro-Canadian methods of teaching.

Perhaps because of early practices in Aboriginal education, as well as what Ogbu (1993) referred to as *involuntary minority* status, Aboriginal children in Canada have experienced less than favorable educational success. The literature reviewed in this chapter emphasized that this lack of achievement is probably the result of incongruencies between the way that teachers teach and the way that most Aboriginal students learn, and not inherent inability on the part of the Aboriginal student.

The literature examined learning styles, teaching styles, and difficulties encountered by educators related to Aboriginal students in a general fashion. Those sources that made specific demographic references overwhelmingly focused on isolated, rural, or band-controlled schools. What was missing from the literature were specific references to educating Aboriginal children in urban schools.

With the exception of Warnica's (1986) research highlighting the lack of preparation of teachers for

teaching urban Aboriginal children and Turner-Laliberte's (1993) work on preventing the drop-out of urban Aboriginal students, I was unable to locate references that either identified or addressed challenges encountered in urban Aboriginal education. Therefore, the thesis of this study was devoted to these issues. Chapter III describes the methodology used.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify areas of challenge experienced by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school. As well, I examined strategies used by educators to address the challenges described.

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methods used to conduct this study, including references to the literature. It is presented in 11 sections: (a) the school and sampling procedures, (b) research method, (c) justification for the research methodology, (d) interview procedures, (e) analysis of data, (f) trustworthiness of interview data, (g) methodological assumptions, (h) limitations, (i) delimitations, (j) issues of confidentiality, and (k) ethical considerations.

The School and Sampling Procedures

The sample involved a non-residential school from a large urban school system situated in a Western Canadian city. The school serves only Aboriginal pupils. As of October, 1997 there was just under 150 students, ranging from Grades 5 to 9. The school employs 16 professional staff comprising 9 teachers, 2 student counsellors, 3 coordinators of Aboriginal programming, and 2 administrators.

Participation in this research project was voluntary. Permission to conduct the research was secured from the

appropriate representative of the district. I contacted both the principal of the school and the district's Native Education Consultant and provided them with an explanation of the research. Both parties expressed their approval and willingness to participate.

About the School

The school building is approximately 50 years old and is situated in a part of the city designated as inner city. From the outside, the school looks like any other: a typical, one storey building surrounded by a large field, a playground, and a staff parking lot.

Once inside the building however, one is promptly made aware of the Aboriginal focus. The walls surrounding the entrance are decorated with Aboriginal artwork and murals portraying respected Aboriginal Elders. Throughout the hallways words of encouragement and inspiration, translated into Cree, adorn the walls.

According to the information brochure developed by the school, since its beginning, the school has provided educational opportunities for Aboriginal students which adhere to the educational guidelines set by the province. In addition, the school provides a full range of academic and special-needs programs which are complemented by a Native Spirituality and Awareness Enhancement component. Further, this same brochure emphasized that the objectives adapted by the school "provide Native students with the ability to

compete with other students in the province and to reaffirm their Native cultural heritage."

The school program was developed through the collaborative efforts of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational community. At the time of inception, almost 20 years ago, it was the desire of these educators that this school would provide a rigorous academic core program, complemented with cultural programming that fostered confidence and pride in students' Aboriginal heritage.

The academic program. The provincial curriculum, with an emphasis and focus on Aboriginal culture and spirituality as well as Cree-language instruction, is taught at the school.

At the junior high level, as well as regular academic programming, the school offers both an Integrated Occupational Program (IOP) and a "modified program." School documentation revealed that the modified program is offered as "an intermediary for students who need some extra assistance but are academically inclined." Both the IOP and modified programs are aligned with the provincial curriculum.

The cultural program. The school offers both Aboriginal cultural and spiritual components. The cultural component

comprised Aboriginal crafts, dancing, history, and language instruction.

In addition, throughout the school year the school hosts such cultural activities as annual powwows, cultural feasts, round dances, sweetgrass and pipe ceremonies, sweats, cultural camps, and visitations from Aboriginal Elders.

Research Method

Data were collected for this study through the use of semistructured interviews (Appendix A). I believe that this research method was a practical and trustworthy data-collection technique. This was supported by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Guba and Lincoln (1985). The use of a semistructured interview protocol allows for the focusing and limiting of questions in order to "approach the world from the subject's perspective" (Berg, 1995, p. 33). This was accomplished "through unscheduled probes that arise from the interview process itself" (p. 33). Further, as Gordon (1975) explained:

> The semi-structured interview gives the interviewer some choice as to the order of the questions, freedom to attempt alternative wordings of the same question, and the freedom to use neutral probes if the first response to a question is not clear, complete, or relevant. (p. 61)

The interviews varied in length from 60 to 90 minutes. The average interview duration was 65 minutes. Interview questions were focused but open-ended in nature. The content

of the interview questions was derived from the literature, as well as from previous survey research conducted by myself.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a typist who provided both a typed transcript and a computer disc containing the transcription data.

In addition, I kept a journal that I used to record such information as the date, time, and duration of each interview. Moreover, following each interview, I chronicled my observations and thoughts. I found this practice to be extremely useful as I began to categorize emerging themes.

Justification for the Research Methodology

Because this study was interpretivistic in nature, the use of a semistructured interview schedule was justified. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described an interview as "a conversation with a purpose" (p. 268). For the purpose of this study, the semistructured, open-ended questions provided a vehicle for gaining insight into and understanding the challenges experienced by educators of Aboriginal children. In addition, this approach allowed for the identification of strategies used by these educators to address the challenges.

Justification for the Use of a Case Study

In referring to the case study approach, Stake (1988; as cited in Rochon, 1997) asserted that "the principal

difference between case studies and other research is that the focus of attention is the case, not the whole population of cases.... The search is for an understanding of the particular case" (p. 34). In a similar vein, Lincoln and Guba (1990) pointed out that case studies are the "best form for reporting on alternative paradigm work because they provide an appropriate vehicle for the 'thick description' which is so essential to an understanding of context and situation" (pp. 53-54). Further, case studies "serve as 'idea catalogs' from which the reader may pick and choose in ways relevant to his or her situation" (p. 54).

Because this study was intended to examine in detail an urban school serving Aboriginal children, the observational case study approach lent itself to accomplishing this task. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), observational case studies concentrate "on a particular organization ... or some aspect of the organization" (p. 59).

Merriam (1988) suggested that there are "four characteristics [that] are essential properties of a qualitative case study: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive" (p. 11). These properties are elaborated as follows:

> *Particularistic* means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon....
> *Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study. *Thick description* is a term [that] means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated....

> *Heuristic* means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study....
> *Inductive* means that for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data -- data ground in the context itself. (pp. 11-13)

Interview Procedure

Participants were involved in one semistructured interview that was arranged to suit their schedule. Interviews were conducted during the months of January and February 1998. The intent of the research, as well as ethical considerations, were shared at the commencement of the interview. Written consent (Appendix B) was secured at this time as well.

Interview Participants

All 16 members of the professional staff of the school were invited to participate in the study. As well, three educators who were previously assigned to the school and the district's Native Education Consultant were approached.

A sample of 14 educators was interviewed. The sample comprised the following staff members of the school: 5 teachers, 2 student counsellors, 2 coordinators of Aboriginal programming, and the assistant principal.

In addition, the following four educators were also interviewed: (a) an educator who had recently served the school for 13 years as a teacher and administrator, (b) the district's Native Education Consultant, and (c) two

educators who had recently served the school. The latter two educators were interviewed during the pilot interview process.

Of the 14 participants, 7 were female and 7 were male. As well, 8 of the participants were of Aboriginal descent and 6 were Caucasian. Referring to the Aboriginal participants, 5 were female and 3 were male. Two of the Caucasian participants were female, and 4 were male.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity of participants, school district, and school. I selected the pseudonyms so that the name of each Aboriginal participant begins with the letter "A." Similarly, the name of each Caucasian participant begins with a "C."

Table 3.1 provides a profile of the participants, including each participants' pseudonym, gender, race, position, years at the school, years in the district, and total years in education.

Interview Question Development

Interview questions were prepared in consultation with doctoral committee members and the literature, as well as a school practitioner who has an earned doctorate in educational administration. I also consulted the district's Native Education Consultant and a Native Counsellor.

Table 3.1. Participant profile.

Participant	Gender	Race	Position	Years at School	Years in District	Total Years in Education
*Carl	male	Caucasian	admin/teach	5-9	20-24	20-24
*Andy	male	Aboriginal	counsellor	0-4	0-4	0-4
Calvin	male	Caucasian	admin/teach	10-14	20-24	20-24
Austin	male	Aboriginal	coordinator	10-14	10-14	10-14
Cam	male	Caucasian	consultant	n/a	25-more	25-more
April	female	Aboriginal	coordinator	5-9	5-9	5-9
Carol	female	Caucasian	teacher	0-4	0-4	0-4
Clint	male	Caucasian	admin/teach	0-4	15-20	15-20
Alan	male	Aboriginal	teacher	5-9	5-9	15-20
Alana	female	Aboriginal	counsellor	10-14	10-14	10-14
Adriana	female	Aboriginal	teacher	0-4	0-4	0-4
Anita	female	Aboriginal	counsellor	5-9	10-14	10-14
Cara	female	Caucasian	teacher	0-4	0-4	0-4
Ann	female	Aboriginal	teacher	0-4	0-4	0-4

* participant involved in pilot interview

Pilot Interviews

Prior to interviewing participants for this case study, pilot interviews were conducted with two individuals. The purpose of this process was to refine and validate the interview schedule and my interviewing skills. The pilot interviews were conducted in January 1998.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) maintained that "ideally, pilot study participants should be drawn from your target population" (p. 30). With this in mind, I chose as a participant a previous administrator of the school. In addition to his administrative duties, he also taught in the school. He acted in this capacity for five years.

The other participant had served the school for three years as a student counsellor. I found his willingness to share insight into subtle issues relating to Aboriginal education very helpful because he is Aboriginal. I interviewed participants at their current places of employment.

I found the opportunity to practice my interviewing skills and test the interview questions to be valuable. Prior to beginning the pilot interviews, I provided each participant with an explanation of the purpose, methodology, and ethics of the study. In addition, both participants were asked to complete a *Consent to Participate in Research* form.

Using Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 30) as a reference, upon completion of each pilot interview I posed to each

participant the following three questions: How clear were the questions? Were the questions appropriate to the purpose of the study? What other questions should I be asking? Both participants provided excellent suggestions for improving the interview schedule and my interviewing techniques.

One use of a pilot study, according to Smith (1993; as cited in Goddard, 1996), is to "gather information related to [the topic of the study]" (p. 63). With this in mind, I conducted the pilot interviews with two educators who had previously been assigned to the school. Therefore, I was able to incorporate the data gathered into the findings.

As was expected, upon completion of the pilot interviews I made revisions to the interview schedule (Appendix A) in consultation with members of my doctoral committee.

Analysis of Data

The interview data collected were analyzed with the use of qualitative data-analysis methods. Merriam (1988) claimed that these methods are appropriate because case study "researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (p. 10).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) described qualitative data analysis as

> the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis

> involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others (p. 145).

Interview responses were audiotaped and transcribed. Weber (1986) observed that "tape recordings combined with written transcripts and notes should be considered the data of preference for analysis" (p. 71). Interview responses were coded and subjected to thematic analysis procedures.

Responses were then segregated into distinct segments, and similarities and differences were identified. Categories were developed as themes and patterns emerged. The interview responses were then reconstructed, which allowed for correlation between categories.

With the exception of correcting grammar and expunging specific information that might enable the reader to identify the participants, school district, or school, all quotations used have been presented verbatim.

Trustworthiness of Interview Data

According to Rudestam and Newton (1992), the term *trustworthiness* is used to illustrate "what conventional researchers think of as internal and external validity, reliability and validity, and objectivity" (p. 77). Referring to the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Guba (1981) used the terms *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability*. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) said that "time at your research site, time spent

interviewing, time to build sound relationships with respondents -- all contribute to trustworthy data" (p. 146).

Triangulation

Issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research can be addressed through the use of triangulation (Berg, 1995; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). Mathison (1988; as cited in Phillips, 1996) claimed that "good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate ... to enhance the validity of research findings" (p. 100). Moreover, "the basic assumption for the use of triangulation is that it will eliminate bias and converge upon the truth" (p. 101).

Furthermore, Berg (1995) explained that "by combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality ... and a means of verifying many of these elements" (pp. 4-5).

The study employed the following triangulation protocols: (a) data source triangulation, (b) theory triangulation, and (c) member checking (Stake, 1995).

Data source triangulation. Stake (1995) defined *data source triangulation* as "an effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found

under different circumstances" (p. 113). I used multiple interview participants to achieve this.

Theory triangulation. *Theory triangulation* occurs when data are shared with "co-observers, panelists, or reviewers" (Stake, 1995, p. 113). This was accomplished through weekly meetings with my doctoral advisor as well as through an in-depth examination of the audit trail by an external specialist in measurement and evaluation. In addition, data were shared with my doctoral committee members and the district's Native Education Consultant. Further description of the audit-trail procedure is provided in the *Dependability* section of this chapter.

Member checking. Trustworthiness of the data is enhanced when participants are "asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability" (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

According to Rudestam and Newton (1992), "Naturalistic studies may involve ... 'member checks' with participants to reconsider the interpretations of the data made by the researcher" (p. 76). In a similar vein, Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) described member checking as the "process of having ... individuals review statements made in the researcher's report for accuracy and completeness" (p. 575). Further, they emphasized that

> member checking might reveal factual errors that are easily corrected. In other instances, the researcher might need to collect more data in order to reconcile discrepancies. It is possible, too, that

> the opportunity to read the report will cause participants to recall new facts or to have new perceptions of their situation. (p. 575)

For the purposes of this study, member checking was accomplished in two ways. First, I contacted all participants and invited them to review their interview transcript. This was followed up with another, personal invitation to review copies of the first draft of both findings chapters, especially where direct quotations were made. No changes resulted from these member checking procedures.

Credibility

Dacus (1995) referred to credibility as "the extent to which one's findings are congruent with reality" (p. 42). I established credibility through (a) using multiple interview participants, (b) conducting member checks with interview participants, (c) remaining on site at the school for the majority of the month of February 1998 to gain a further insight into the culture of the school, (d) corroborating data and findings with my doctoral committee members, and (e) meetings weekly with my doctoral supervisor.

Transferability

Stake (1995; as cited in Rochon, 1997) stressed:

> The real business of a case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what

> it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (p. 34)

With this in mind, I intended the study to provide a "thick description" (Guba, 1981) of insights into (a) the challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school, and (b) strategies that educators use to address these challenges.

Dependability

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) referred to dependability as "a fit between what they [researchers] record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study" (p. 44). I used several strategies to ensure dependability of the findings. First, I triangulated the data through the use of multiple-interview participants and member checks. Second, I delineated details of (a) the approach to the study, (b) the data collection, and (c) the data analysis (Merriam, 1988). As well, I conducted pilot interviews with two educators.

I maintained an audit trail that included audiotapes and transcripts of each interview, and journal notes. Owens (1982) claimed that

> the existence of a carefully-documented audit trail makes it possible to do two important things: (1) to examine the procedures of the study, either while it is in progress or after the fact, in order to verify its consistency and credibility by independent external auditors; and (2) to make it possible to reproduce the study at another time. (p. 13)

The audit trail was examined by an external specialist who spot checked each of the 14 tapes to verify the transcripts. He then read each transcript and examined each of the findings chapters. According to the auditor, the data analysis, emergent themes, and expansion of the themes were appropriate and accurate in reporting the findings of the study.

Confirmability

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated that "in qualitative research, the researcher's role is to observe and measure, and care is taken to keep the researcher from 'contaminating' the data" (p. 6). According to Guba (1981), neutrality is the aspect of trustworthiness that the term *confirmability* addresses. She claimed that qualitative researchers "shift the burden of neutrality from the investigator to the data, requiring evidence not of the certifiability of the investigator or his or her methods but of the confirmability of the data produced" (pp. 81-82).

As previously explained, I used such strategies as (a) multiple interview participants, (b) member checking, (c) weekly meetings with my doctoral supervisor, and (d) an audit trail to ensure confirmability of the data produced.

Methodological Assumptions

This study was based on the assumption that participants responded to the interview questions in an

honest manner. It is also assumed that all answers and input were provided free from pressure or intimidation by anyone within or without the school or the school district.

Because this study employed a qualitative data-gathering strategy, one which relied on the participants' perceptions and experiences, it was assumed that "what the [participants] say they believe, the feelings they express, and explanations they give are treated as significant realities" (Dacus, 1995, p. 21). I therefore accepted the responses of the participants as accurate representations of what occurred in the school.

Limitations

This study was confined to voluntary educator participation. With this in mind, I risked an insufficient participation rate. Furthermore, the educators who took part in this study were not necessarily representative of all educators who serve Aboriginal children.

The findings of this study were limited by the selected research methodology. The sole data-gathering technique was semistructured interviews. Other information-gathering strategies were not included, therefore limiting the variety of data obtained. Moreover, the validity of the data collected from the participants was limited by the extent to which the interview questions addressed the research questions.

Qualitative research recognizes the researcher's influence on the collection as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Therefore, applicability of the findings to other researchers in other settings is limited.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to data generated through interviewing (a) 10 educators deployed at one urban school, (b) the district's Native Education Consultant, and (c) three members of staff who were previously assigned to the school. The student population of the school was exclusively Aboriginal. Data gathering for the study was delimited to the timeframe of January and February of 1998.

This study was delimited to challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children in an urban school. It did not take into account the personal qualities of the participating educators.

Issues of Confidentiality

In keeping with most case study research, to ensure the anonymity of the participants involved in the study, I used pseudonyms. In addition, the participating school was referred to as *the school*, and the school district to which the school belongs was referred to as *the district*.

Ethical Considerations

In adherence with University of Alberta requirements, prior to beginning this study a Department of Educational Policy Studies research ethics review was conducted in strict adherence to the requirements outlined in the document titled *University Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants* (1991).

The following ethical considerations guided the study:

1. Written permission to conduct research was obtained from (a) the appropriate representative of the school district in which the school is located, and (b) the principal of the school.

2. The purpose of the study was outlined during a staff meeting, as well as by letter to (a) the appropriate representative of the district, (b) the principal of the school, and (c) the educators participating in the study. As well, I informed all participants of their right not to participate in or to withdraw from participating in the study at any time, without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, prior to each interview I took an opportunity once again to explain the research and participant rights. In addition, I answered questions from the participants.

3. All formal interview participants were asked to sign a document indicating their approval and willingness to participate. This occurred prior to the interview procedure.

4. All information collected through either formal or informal interviews with the participants of this study was treated as confidential.

5. All transcripts were assigned codes to ensure participant confidentiality.

6. The formal audiotaped interviews were transcribed by a typist who was informed of the confidential nature of the material. Assurance was secured from this person that all information would be treated in confidence.

Summary

This chapter describes the methods used (a) to investigate areas of challenge experienced by educators of urban Aboriginal children, and (b) to examine strategies used by educators to address the identified challenges. A description of the school used in this case study, as well as profiles of the 14 participants, are also presented in this chapter.

Each participant was exposed to one semistructured interview, which was audiotaped and transcribed. Participants were invited to review their transcripts for accuracy. No revisions resulted. The transcripts provided the source for data used in this research study.

The data were subsequently analyzed, and the findings are presented and discussed in detail in the next four chapters.

CHAPTER IV

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY EDUCATORS IN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL SCHOOL

The purpose of this chapter is to address the first research question:

What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

The data presented in this chapter are organized in five sections. The first four sections address the conceptual framework. Findings are presented under the headings (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major findings related to Question 1.

Challenges Encountered With Students

Six themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) learning styles, (b) attendance, (c) preparedness for school, (d) structure, (e) behaviors, and (f) respect for education.

Learning Styles

In addition to discussion on learning styles, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) language barriers, and (b) diversity.

Several participants spoke of their belief that Aboriginal students learn in ways different from the

majority culture. Carl, who has since moved to another school within the district, found that "a large portion of Aboriginal kids learn in very, very different ways than most kids here do." Likewise, Alana asserted, "I'm inclined to believe that Native people learn a little bit differently than non-Native people." In reference to mainstream teaching practices, she claimed, "I believe that the model for non-Native Canadians doesn't necessarily fit for Native Canadians. I think sometimes we are trying to fit a round peg into a square hole; it doesn't fit." Therefore, she stated, "I think from the moment the child walks into the classroom, they are set up."

Cam was reluctant to generalize that Aboriginal children learn in ways different from those of the mainstream culture. However, as he rationalized his position, he eventually aligned with the notion forwarded by Carl and Alana. When asked if there is a distinct Aboriginal learning style, Cam replied:

> That's really a contentious issue these days, and it's very difficult for me to say, "Yes, there is an Aboriginal learning style," because Aboriginals have been mixing with everybody since day one, since we first came together on this continent. So to say that an Aboriginal child has within his or her genetics the predisposition to a certain style is very, very iffy.

However, Cam also pointed out:

> We did in our school district three straight years of stats gathering on achievement levels, and we looked at [the school] and then other schools. And every year [the school] was lower than all others --

except in one area. That area was nonverbal learning.

With this in mind, Cam acknowledged:

> It's a very, very tough call. I don't want to see what I'm seeing.... There was a noticeable shift in that one category, that the kids did succeed in that one area of nonverbal learning, ... which aligns with some of the literature that says there is a distinct learning style for Aboriginals.... Bang! Tough, tough to say that.

Language barriers. Both Austin and Ann spoke to the challenge of language barriers encountered by urban Aboriginal students. Austin observed that "a lot of these kids who are coming to [the school] are coming from isolated communities. And right away they have a language barrier."

Similarly, Ann felt that language was a barrier for urban Aboriginal students because

> it was never properly learned by their [parents. Therefore] English is still being fractured because their parents learned from their parents, and they from their parents. What English has been learned has never been pure English.

Speaking as an Aboriginal person, Ann further elaborated, "English is our second language; it is not our first language. Even with the kids being born today, the English they are going to learn is still fractured. That's the way they learn it." Therefore, she recommended that students be exposed to an English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum, which at the time of this study was not occurring.

Diversity. It was the consensus of several participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, that it is inappropriate to assume that all Aboriginal people are the same. Speaking from her own experience, Anita felt that students

> know what that feels like, to be seen as a group and not as an individual, and it trivializes something that's very important to them. It trivializes something that's very important to me when I'm seen as a group and not as an individual.

Calvin also spoke from experience. Using an example to illustrate his point, he stated:

> I sat in the same room with Aboriginal people and read this beautiful book that contained an owl. And a very strong Cree person in the same room said, "The owl is a symbol of death ... I'm sorry, we can't bring this into our classrooms." And in that same room, another person who was part Sioux and part Ojibwa did not have the same belief system.

Attendance

Lack of regular attendance and a subtheme, transience, were identified as challenges by the participants. Summarizing the group's frustration, Cara claimed that "getting the kids here is the number-one challenge." Expanding on this point, she commented:

> I had a class today ... with two kids. I find that so discouraging. And the kids do too. They find it lonely. The whole idea of having a classroom and bouncing ideas and having discussions, it doesn't happen.

Linking attendance to achievement, Cam voiced his frustration as follows: "Because attendance is a major problem with a lot of Native kids, they are going to get

farther behind because they are going to miss out on that area of learning and teaching." Therefore, he further elaborated: "Do our kids do well on achievement tests? The shits. Why? They are nonattenders. They miss so much school. They miss so much content."

Transience. Several participants, in addition to expressing concern regarding attendance, focused attention on issues stemming from student transience. According to Carl, a former administrator at the school, "There is no doubt that the first four months are a huge trial, because we would lose probably fifteen percent of our population by Christmas."

From her perspective in the classroom, Carol revealed, "We have had thirty new students since January fifth. Now that's a challenge. I felt like quitting last Monday." Emphasizing the breadth of this issue, Alana shared an example of a student who had recently enrolled at the school:

> When we talked about "Where did you go to school?" he was going to [another school], from Grade One to Grade six. I asked, "Peter, can you tell me about your school life?" And by the time I got it all on paper, he had been in about fifteen different schools. He didn't even go to school for Grade Three.

Preparedness for School

In the discussion on lack of preparedness for school, three subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were

(a) academic skills and attitudes, (b) home life, and (c) social skills.

Academic skills and attitudes. Participants highlighted a lack of academic skills and negative attitudes towards learning in the urban Aboriginal students attending the school. Carl remarked, "I have been in eight other schools, including inner city schools, and that was the most unique in the sense that they were far less prepared than anybody else." Elaborating, he noted that students,

> were not ready to sit in a regular, structured classroom and work from the point of view of twenty-five or thirty to a classroom. I would say that there was little, if any, regular-type preparedness. So to apply a regular teaching situation to those kids would be very, very difficult. In many ways it had to be altered.

Cam confirmed Carl's statement. He too observed that "a major challenge is the ability of our kids to handle a regular school program."

Referring to the transition from elementary to junior high school, Alana revealed:

> It's chaotic. They have not had the prerequisites for junior high. In other words, what I'm saying is, from kindergarten to Grade Seven there has been intermittent education.... So when they come to junior high, they are ill-prepared to meet the demands.

Home life. The relationship between student home lives and their preparation for school was presented as a challenge by the majority of the participants. Summarizing the consensus of the group, Carl stated, "Kids definitely

come to school with issues and lots and lots of baggage." Furthermore, "a lot of those kids ... are very, very dysfunctional." Ann concurred with Carl. She maintained: "If you really want to be truly realistic, we have the problems we have because of the kids we have. Most of our kids are high need. Ninety percent of them are high need."

Alana felt that

> one of the things I think is unique to this setting is the children are coming from homes that are chaotic. So it's very difficult for them to be in a learning mode or be able to learn because of where they come from.

Ann lent support to Alana. She concluded, "These are street kids with many, many problems. Their immediate problem is survival." With this in mind, she pondered, "How do we expect to teach them in school? Because this is a nagging thing behind them: 'How am I going to survive tonight?'"

In response, Anita remarked that the urban Aboriginal community is aware of this challenge and have requested that the school aggressively teach the students living skills. Referring to an education symposium hosted by the district, she recalled that "the number-one thing that [Aboriginal] people wanted was, they wanted children to be taught how to live. They wanted children to learn living skills." At the time of this study this recommendation was yet to be formally implemented at the school.

Social skills. Several participants reported that a challenge in working with urban Aboriginal students was

their apparent lack of social skills. Clint supported this claim with this example:

> Let's say you and I are speaking, a kid walks up to me and taps me on the shoulder and starts asking a question. He doesn't seem to have the social skill to know to wait, or to interrupt appropriately and politely. And then if you say, "Just a second. Let me finish here" he will be kind of upset with you and walk away. And I have seen that happen several times around here, that if you don't give them your attention immediately, then they don't want it.

On the other hand, Ann thought that behavior such as that described above might be justified. Although she conceded that the social skills of the students are an "extremely" significant challenge, she wondered if student behaviors and interactions are being "misinterpreted" by mainstream society.

Structure

Many of the participants identified as a challenge to students the expectations for structure in the learning environment, where for example, tasks are assigned by the teacher. Once again, the home life of students was stressed as a major cause of this concern. Clint summed up the sentiment of the group: "The structure is so different here than it is in their homes that it's a conflict for them." Andy expanded on Clint's comments:

> I think you are dealing with a group of children who, for all intents and purposes, because of family issues or what have you, come from a background that has very little structure. So that's a challenge: being able to deal with the child who has known absolutely no structure in their life, and to try to teach them structure and to teach them how to be

> responsible as far as time management goes; having assignments done on time; being to class on time; and that kind of stuff. That's a challenge!

Behaviors

In addition to discussion on student behaviors, five subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) gang involvement, (b) disrespect, (c) self-esteem, (d) trust and testing, and (e) effects of addictions.

Most participants spoke to challenges related to student behaviors. Carl described these behaviors as those

> that would get in the way of a regular kind of teaching situation. So those include a whole variety of things, from the most bizarre to regular kinds of little incidents that every kid in every school does, but much more frequent. Frequency was definitely an issue, and a higher range of bizarre kinds of things happening in classrooms.

Addressing more serious issues of student behavior, Carl revealed, "I have seen everything, from literally a murder across the street in a Native drug house to stabbings to ducking from punches from both kids and parents." Ann supported Carl's assessment:

> Because we get all, I should not say bad apples, but problem kids, kids that have severe problems, be it with the law or emotional or whatnot, it's always in the back of a teacher's mind, the violence towards not only the kids, [but] more so towards yourself, the violence towards teachers.

Gang involvement. The participants emphasized the effect of out-of-school activities as a challenge; specifically, gang related issues. Carol agreed that, "Yes, there are gang issues.... It's hard to accept that these

kids that you care so much about are out doing B and Es and out stealing cars."

In defence of the students, Ann said:

> In a city, in an urban area, these kids are ten times worse off than the kids on a reserve. On a reserve you have family, be it a cousin twice removed, an auntie of an auntie's auntie, or my friend's auntie, whatever. There's that community. If a kid on a reserve is not in school and you can't find them, you know they are on the reserve. They stay within their boundaries, the boundaries of the reserve, because it is safe. They feel safe there. Here in an urban area, if you have a kid run away, you don't know where that kid is. It's dangerous here, and that's where the survival comes in. These kids are in an environment where they have to look out for "Number One." Gang activity: The more kids you get together, the more power you have. That's protection. It's survival.

Disrespect. Student disrespect directed at educators, school, and each other was identified by many participants as a challenge. Ann vented her frustration with the lack of respect that she perceived from the students. Early in our interview, she shared her feelings of the importance of demonstrating respect towards Elders. She explained that this is a part of Aboriginal culture and teaching. With this in mind, Ann said, "This is a school where we are dealing with Native children. Now, respect is supposed to be number one, but it is not." Likewise, Austin, who is also of Aboriginal descent, noted that at the school, "Respect is certainly deteriorating at a fast pace: towards the teachers, towards the school, towards each other."

Self-esteem. Several participants spoke to the challenge of low student esteem. Justifying some of the perceived student behavior and attitude concerns, Cara asserted:

> You never hear a compliment [from students]. And they are very critical.... It's just that they are damaged. They have been so damaged all their lives. Nothing good is said about them. They are just going to come back at you.

Addressing the challenge of self-esteem specific to the classroom, Adriana suggested that "if someone feels good about themselves, 'I will try it again, I will try it again.' But they feel so threatened if they don't understand it."

Trust and testing. Many participants pointed to issues of trust as an educational challenge. Referring to the school, Carl, who had previously served the school as an administrator and has since moved to another school within the district, revealed that "here, respect comes automatically with the position; and there, for sure it doesn't. If anything, you are going to face greater challenge because you are [an administrator]." Carol concurred with Carl's statement. She claimed that urban Aboriginal students "don't see you as an automatic authority figure."

Several participants were eager to justify why urban Aboriginal students had difficulty with building trust with educators. Alan pointed out:

> The kids don't trust anybody. Because their caregivers, the primary caregivers, the mother, the father, one of them is usually gone. Takes off, dies. They even get angry if there's a suicide in the home. They get mad at the parent for deserting them. Then the kid walks in [the school]; maybe he's been beat up the night before, maybe he's been hanging around with the wrong crowd. So you have a whole peer group that works against the school, against the educational system.

Similarly, April observed:

> Our students have a very hard time trusting, and they will test and they will test for a very long time. And they are not used to authority, because some of them don't even have parents. Some of them *are* the parents at home.

Effects of addictions. Challenges stemming from both students dealing with addictions and the physiological effects of addictions on students were identified. Several participants reported the regular use of alcohol and drugs by students. In addition, Andy suggested that a major issue facing urban Aboriginal students is "kids who are dealing with addictions; kids who are not necessarily directly addicted, but who are dealing with parents, uncles, aunts, and siblings who are addicted."

Both Andy and Adriana raised concern with respect to behavioral challenges that are directly related to the physiological effects of addictions. Both educators identified such things as fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, attention deficit disorder, and substance-abuse-related learning disabilities as factors that have an impact on student behavior.

Respect for Education

In the discussion on lack of respect for education, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) absence of goals, and (b) marginalized people.

Voicing her frustration, Carol stated, "I don't know how to instill in them to see education as a means to an end." Ann addressed what she felt was the root of this problem:

> What Native people are missing today is the work part. They don't appreciate -- because they are not working. Ninety percent of our clients are on some form of assistance: social assistance, ... welfare. They are not working for their money, doing manual labor or working with their minds or doing work as mainstream society sees it. Now our kids, that's all they see. They don't see their parents working. They just see the money. They get money at the end of the month.... Or they see their friends, fifteen, sixteen years old, going out, having a baby, because welfare will pay you to have a baby.

Absence of goals. The data indicated the absence of long-term goals by students as a challenge. Referring to students, April maintained:

> They don't have goals. And it's partly cultural, I would say, and partly, a lot of their parents don't have an education. So education is not really a goal, and having a career is not really a goal.

Alana claimed student depression was a significant contributor to this challenge. She asserted that students "lack goals, lack any look at the future because their past has been so bad. They don't see the future, any brightness or *anything*."

Both Ann and Anita addressed this challenge through references to what they termed *learned helplessness*. Ann summarized this notion as follows:

> As far back as I guess the Treaties, it was always, "What's in it for me?" It still goes back to that five-dollar-a-year Treaty money. You are being paid; you are always being paid. Like the Treaty money. The government gives you five bucks a year if you are Status. If you are Status, you also get most of your medical. It's been a learned behavior. A lot of these kids are on social assistance; their parents are on social assistance. And that just perpetuates the "What's in it for me?" It's not money that they earn themselves. It's a vicious circle that just keeps going around and around.

Anita confirmed Ann's statement. She concluded that, as a result of the learned helplessness paradigm, "kids don't believe that they will be anything other than what their parents were, which was on welfare."

Marginalized people. A lack of identification with either their Aboriginal culture or the mainstream culture was identified as a challenge for urban Aboriginal students. Andy reported that "there are some students who have never been a part of their traditions, never been a part of their community."

Cam placed the onus for this concern upon the parents of urban Aboriginal children. He said, "Look at the kind of families they are coming from. Those families don't have any connection with their culture. What can you expect from these kids?" In a similar vein, Calvin elaborated:

> I know [an educator] has talked to you about the "Marginal Man," the idea of these students, many of

> them carrying both cultures and having to fit into the predominant culture. But of course they bring their connection with their past and their roots, and the conflict with dressing in the Chicago Bulls' jacket and competing with the urban youth in the city. They want the middle of both cultures. Which way they lean or go back depends on the variables at that particular time.

In light of this, Alan attempted to tie the notion of marginalization to behavior. Focusing on the "bigger picture," he reflected:

> I think what happens is, they get assimilated ... to the sub-culture that exists on the street. They are not assimilated into Grandview Heights. So are they going into band studies at the Kiwanis Music Festival? No, they are going into Harry's Pool Hall and places like that. So the low-lifes, if I could use that word, of the White society -- that's the people they are getting assimilated with. And they are not making that break. So they are still back where they were a hundred years ago, except they don't know it. They are not aware of it.... My own family is still like that. I broke out of the mould, but that was the exception rather than the rule.

Referring to his own experience, Alan continued his description:

> They had matriarchs back then. My grandmother was the matriarch of our family. Everything came down from her. She acted in everybody's good, and they accepted her because of that. That's why we survived. Now these kids are growing up without that. And [Aboriginal] society has always operated like that. It's either been patrilineal or matrilineal.... You had a leader, and the leader was always the one who almost came up with the policy, and everybody bought into that policy.

With this in mind, Alan concluded:

> What you have is people on the street taking the place of the uncle. You have people in the pool hall taking the place of the grandfathers. You have storekeepers taking the place of the cousins. Very impersonal people; people who do not have a hand in the student's upbringing and raising.

Challenges Encountered With Parents

The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of three themes. These themes were (a) poverty, (b) parenting skills, and (c) distrust of mainstream education

Poverty

The participants discussed poverty and issues related to poverty as a challenge. Alana lent support by remarking, "There's no use pretending it's not there. Sometimes the families are very poor. Sometimes it's not the dysfunction; they are just poor." Cam was more direct and pointed through his claim that

> the number-one challenge is the family structure that our kids are coming from. That, in my opinion, is probably the biggest factor in why our kids are like they are. And the family structure talks about the disruption that goes on in families -- the alcohol, the abuse things. All the things that are pandemic in homes that are stressed with poverty and stressed with all those other things.

Both Cam and Clint emphasized the relationship between poverty and attendance. Clint summarized their feelings: "[students] are staying home because they can't afford a bus pass."

Parenting Skills

In the discussion on parenting skills, three subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) the vicious circle, (b) marginalized people, and (c) addictions.

A majority of the participants highlighted parenting skills as a challenge. According to Alana, "You can imagine

some of the chaotic lives they come from. There is no bedtime. There is no suppertime. There is *no* time."

April shared this example:

> I have a girl in my dance troupe from a family of six, aged about three to sixteen. Dad committed suicide about five years ago, and the two younger kids have different fathers. Mom is in her early thirties, and she leaves those kids for days, sometimes weeks at a time. She will just disappear. She will go to Fort McMurray. She has had different men in her life that she goes off with. The older ones are left with the younger ones, who are three and six, taking care of them for days at a time. It is abandonment. When mom is in the picture, there is constant verbal abuse. She is constantly threatening to do this or do that, or she will tell them, "Oh, I have cancer. I'm only going to live a couple more months." She constantly plays with their emotions. She plays with them and toys with them. Meanwhile, the kids are at home doing all the cooking and changing the diapers and giving baths to the younger children. Playing mom. Even though the particular girl I am thinking of is thirteen, she is left to be mom.

The vicious circle. Alan explained some of the concerns with parenting skills, from his own perspective and his own experience. He pointed out:

> What you are dealing with, basically, is a nuclear family which is very transient. They don't have the support systems that used to exist even fifty years ago.... The parents, a lot of them are in despair. How can they be teaching good values when they are in despair themselves? It just keeps repeating itself. They want to do better, but they just basically wake up in the morning, throw their hands up, the kid goes to school or wherever, and they just give up. And once they have given up, you try and rein them in. It is very difficult.

Austin theorized that this challenge could be effectively addressed if the school were to provide cultural healing opportunities to parents. He strongly believed that

exposing parents to Elders and thereby enhancing their understanding of their culture and spirituality would result in positive outcomes for both parents and their children. Cam agreed with Austin; however, he cautioned that many of the Elders in the community were themselves victims of the vicious circle. Therefore, great care would have to be exercised in selecting Elders.

Marginalized people. Both Cam and Alan tied concern with parenting skills to the notion of parental misunderstanding of their culture. Cam described this phenomenon as follows: "Most of our kids are coming from situations that are culture-less because their parents have no idea of the culture."

Addictions. Alan, Ann, and Andy spoke to the challenge of alcohol and drug addiction affecting the ability of parents to raise their children. In addition, Alan added gambling addictions as a challenge.

Distrust of Mainstream Education

This theme and a subtheme, defensiveness, were identified as challenges by the participants. Cam charged, "A lot of parents talk about education as being important. I believe for seventy percent of them, it is lip service." Several participants supported Cam's stance. However, many of them also emphasized that an absence of trust and respect from Aboriginal parents explained this apparent lack of

support. Alan stated, "The biggest challenge I see here right now is there is a resistance to the educational system, usually by the parents. And it is passed down to the kid."

April concurred with Alan:

> In a lot of cases, the children that we have in our school are being raised by a grandparent, and the grandparents have been in residential schools. And I think that there is a distrust and even maybe a hatred towards the way the whole system works, and they are scared of it or they do not understand it.

Defensiveness. Both Alan and Carl claimed parental defensiveness as a challenge. Both speculated that this situation resulted from issues of distrust of Aboriginal parents, directed toward mainstream education. According to Alan, Aboriginal parents

> don't trust. These buildings or these institutions here are very intimidating for a lot of the people, so they come in defensive. And when you are defensive, sometimes you go on the offensive. So they come in angry.

Challenges Encountered With Educators

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) educator cultural conflict, (b) job-related stress, and (c) staff cohesion.

Educator Cultural Conflict

In addition to discussion on the cultural conflict of educators, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged.

They were (a) lack of preparedness, and (b) cultural misunderstandings.

The majority of participants described cultural conflict and lack of preparedness on the part of educators as a challenge. With this in mind, Andy expressed his belief that "teachers have to, first and foremost, take into consideration the ethnic origin of the students they are working with." Furthermore, he theorized that in order for awareness to occur, educators would have to assess "their own personal feelings toward learning about cultural values and the ethics associated with children of Aboriginal descent."

Calvin shared a personal example of an incident between himself and an Aboriginal Elder. The incident occurred during a cultural ceremony at the school. He recounted:

> I remember him coming in and putting the guys on the inside and the women on the outside and spreading the pipe around. I was sitting right next to him. So after it got to me, rather than go around the circle again, I turned and passed the pipe to the women behind us. He said: "No, no, women don't participate in pipe." I could not make an issue at that particular time and told him later of my own personal values.... And one of the things that I truly believed, and believed very strongly, was that for two thousand years we have discounted women, and my own personal value system would not allow me to do that.

Lack of preparedness. Both Cam and Ann indicated that the lack of preparation of educators to work with urban Aboriginal children was a challenge. Cam reflected that, in his estimation, when educators first arrive they "don't

realize the kinds of stuff that goes on in our school. I hate to be always negative, but that is seemingly the thing that is causing us all the grief among our teaching staff."

Ann, who is an Aboriginal educator who began her teaching career later in life, remarked that "if I was in my early twenties like a lot of these kids that go into teaching, I would not survive." She justified this comment as follows: "I have seen it. I have seen the turnover of young teachers who could not handle it."

Cultural misunderstandings. Many participants spoke of educators lowering their educational standards in response to not understanding or misinterpreting Aboriginal cultural issues. They claimed that this challenge is because of educators being "too sensitive" or "too careful."

Andy emphasized that "it is very important that teachers allow children to be accountable." He felt that some educators might not hold Aboriginal students to high educational standards because they "do not want to offend them because of their Aboriginal heritage." Calvin expanded on Andy's comments:

> The biggest problem was dealing with a lot of kids that were sent to us because they were [perceived] behavior problems or low achievers. They were Native and did things different culturally. They could still participate in education, but if they did not stand up and blurt out answers or raise their hands or do all the overt things that we need to check whether students are following along with us, these kids were ignored.... Teachers would, I think with good intentions, say, "I like this little person. I

> won't embarrass him. I won't hold him accountable for the learning."

Job-Related Stress

Job-related stress and a subtheme, role diversity, were put forth as challenges by the participants. Cam theorized why educators of urban Aboriginal children are under stress:

> It is the full-meal deal. You have to do the "Full Monty" with our kids. No half measures. If you don't devote your bloody life, it doesn't work. There is a big need, and that need has to be expressed by total involvement. And that's why it is so exhausting for staff. They just wear out.

According to Cara, "It gets to the point too where it *is* a different school. It *is* a different kind of stress on your life. And it is a different type of teaching, completely."

Role diversity. Both Clint and Calvin referred to this challenge. Reflecting on previous assignments in other district schools, Clint asserted:

> The roles in this school are more diverse than they would be in other schools, whether it is the assistant principal, the counsellor, or the librarian. The roles are more diverse. You have your hand in a lot more things. There just seems to be a need. So I am saying we are responding to a need.

In support of Clint, Calvin shared that

> I did not realize as a classroom teacher and then a supporter of the classroom teacher in my administrative role how ignorant I was of what was involved. My very first situation at [the school], I was doing a lesson with some remedial kids, and we were doing some poetry and creative writing. We were listening to Fats Domino. I was up on the desk and I

> was playing with my yardstick. We were just having a great time and being reasonably productive.... Then I hear this pounding on the door. A teacher comes in and says: "So-and-so in Grade Nine just told me to f*** off, and I can't take it any longer." Immediately I had to shift from the really happy role to this supporter of teachers, and I did not realize that we had to change so much, that we had to change our roles so dramatically. And that kind of shocked me.

Staff Cohesion

Data analysis identified a lack of staff cohesion to be a challenge. In addition, three subthemes which appear to be related emerged. They were (a) reluctant staff, (b) racism, and (c) reverse racism.

In referring to the work relations among staff, Austin claimed, "I wouldn't call it a team." Similarly, Adriana maintained, "I think our staff -- we're really close -- but then there is always tension." She went on to say, "The sad thing is, I don't think administration is aware of it."

Reluctant staff. Carol and Cara both confirmed that there are concerns with staff cohesion in the school. They attributed this challenge to the district practice of assigning staff to the school against their wishes. To illustrate, Cara stated:

> I think, unfortunately, in our district, many people are almost exiled to [the school]. And that's really unfortunate. I think our school is the one that needs very motivated, very driven teachers to *make* the kids motivated and driven. If you get people who are dumped here, the kids are going to know.

Racism. Several participants highlighted racism on the part of educators as a challenge. Approaching this issue from a global or "big picture" perspective, Anita said that in general,

> people don't do *different* real well. We don't do different with age, with gender, with ethnicity.... We often see within the primary differences, which are all those things like religion and your sexual orientation. We often see gays, for instance, as one thing. And as for the ethnic group I'm from, I am often seen as one thing.

Anita then focused specifically on the school. In response to the educator racism she has witnessed at the school, she cautioned:

> If you are going to work in my community, the political climate today suggests that you can't work in the community and enjoy the economic benefits of it, and then go home and complain about what a tax burden we are. Those days are gone. So if you can demonstrate to me that you care and you want this community to do well, and it matters to you, that you have a deep commitment to that community, I can live and work with that. But I can't work with the old way of thinking that says, "Oh my God, you should see all these Indians that I work with. I wish they'd just get to work."

Both April and Alana confirmed Anita's assessment. However, their comments were less focused on the global issues and more focused on the school staff. April reported:

> We have had staff here in the past who didn't care about Native culture. They didn't care where the student came from or the home life that they had or their difficulties. They just didn't care.... Therefore, they didn't belong here.

Speaking to the impact of racism on the performance of educators, Cara said:

> I get very frustrated, very frustrated. Unfortunately in our district, they dump people here. It is very evident. We have a lot of great teachers, but ... I really think that they have to be careful who they put in this school because some people are racist. They don't expect these kids to do well. "They're Native kids. They're going to pass? Give me a break!"

April agreed with Cara. Referring to the present staff at the school, she estimated that "you have maybe twenty percent really going the extra mile with staying late every day, and students love them."

Reverse racism. Four participants addressed racism originating from Aboriginal staff that was directed at both students and staff as a challenge. Two participants were Aboriginal themselves. Cam revealed that "We have had to dismiss Natives who disliked intensely the kinds of kids that came to [the school]." He explained this phenomenon as follows: "Sometimes you get Native ... staff who are outright racists. And that has happened to our staff."

Calvin recounted an incident he encountered in his first few days of service at the school. He was confronted by an Aboriginal staff member who directly stated to him: "Hey, another *'Mooniyaw.'* I wonder how long he's going to last." Calvin claimed, "I took that as a personal challenge right off the bat."

Both April and Alan placed this issue in perspective. Each of these educators is Aboriginal, and each voiced their discomfort with the issue of reverse racism. April

emphasized, "I don't share those views, that it has to be an Aboriginal person that works here. I think a non-Aboriginal person can be very effective here too." Alan concurred with April. During our interview I discussed this issue with him. When asked if there was a difference being an Aboriginal versus a non-Aboriginal educator, he asserted:

> In my opinion, it means *zero*, and I mean *zero*. Absolutely none. And that's the honest truth, because the effectiveness is going to come from your heart, not from your skin color. The kids know that. I've seen instance upon instance too, from my own experience working with Native educators and White or Black or whatever color they are: The kids will perform -- that's the word; they will do their best for the people they trust and like because they know that those teachers are on their side. And I've seen cases where there was a Native teacher who was so disliked that they basically drove that person out of the school -- a pure Native boy, right from the reserve, because of that person's qualities. That person didn't appear to want to build relationships. That person appeared to want to come in and just teach the nouns and the verbs and then go home. The kids smelled that; they smelled it out, and they went after that person. And it was sad to see. But there were some White teachers that the kids hold in very, very high esteem because of who they are, just because of who the person is, who the teacher is. So in answer to your question, I give you an unequivocal *zero*. It doesn't matter. It's the qualities inside.

Challenges Encountered With Administrators

Five themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) school mandate, (b) segregation, (c) basic skills, (d) district disrespect, and (e) resources.

School Mandate

Analysis of the data identified inconsistencies in the mandate of the school, and a subtheme, cultural voids, to be challenges. It was the consensus of many participants that at present, there is a difference between the school's philosophy and what is actually happening. Referring to the actual school building, Adriana felt that "it just doesn't reflect the program. It's square, and it has long hallways.... It just doesn't feel comfortable to me."

Alana was more specific in her assessment. Addressing the concern of the school mandate not meshing with reality, she claimed:

> It's a whole combination of -- it's the entire environment. So who's in the environment? I'm in the environment, teachers are in the environment, administration is in the environment. The set-up is totally off. It's no different that any other school. It has a Native name, but it's still using the old way: teaching styles, environment, everything.

Cultural voids. Several participants made direct reference to inconsistencies in the ways that the school is currently reflecting the culture and spirituality of Aboriginal people. Cam revealed, "We do not have a consistent, day-in, day-out focus on the cultural stuff."

Referring specifically to spirituality, Austin criticized the present situation at the school. He made the point that small, ceremonial gestures are not enough. He maintained that "just doing sweetgrass in the morning is not

spirituality." Furthermore, he claimed that there were no Elders or other spiritual leaders assisting the school. Austin indicated:

> Every time I hear about what the school is doing, they focus on the word *spirituality*. And I am asking, "Who is teaching spirituality?" because I certainly couldn't find anybody who was.... I haven't seen any Elders being a part of that school.

Segregation

The findings indicated that segregation and a subtheme, comfort zone, were educational challenges. Four participants raised concern with the idea of having a school within the district which serves only Aboriginal students. Three of the concerned were Aboriginal. However, another participant, who is also Aboriginal, expressed unequivocal support for the issue of segregation.

Ann, having explained that she attended residential schools as a child, was quite critical of the way the school is currently, to use her words, "segregating" the students. She remarked, "I like the ideas they have in this school. I just don't like the segregation. It reminds me of a residential school in a modern setting." She further questioned whether students are being labelled by attending a segregated setting. She felt that "by putting Aboriginal kids in an all-Aboriginal school, they are branded. They have a label on them, and that works against them in mainstream society. So they have a strike [against them] right there."

Ann went so far as to suggest that the school be dissolved. She said: "I'd sooner see these kids in a public school, where they can interact in the multicultural society, a true multicultural society, where you have Caucasians and you have Lebanese, and have East Indian and Canadian Indian."

However, at the same time Ann also acknowledged that perhaps segregation was a viable educational practice. She conceded: "And yet in a plain public school, Native kids are having many, many problems. And the reality is, maybe they are better off in a school like this." In a similar vein, April offered her support for the mandate of the school. She claimed:

> When I first started here I had some of those attitudes. I was like, "God! What is this with segregation? What are we doing? Why are we segregating these students? Wouldn't they be much better off absorbed into the other schools?"... I had those questions. And I guess I have addressed those questions that I had about segregation, assimilation, and the importance of having a program like this. I guess just by being here long enough to see the value of it.... My answer now is, these are kids that wouldn't survive anywhere else. These are kids that would drop out anywhere else. They have to come to [the school] because they would fall between the cracks in any other school. Here they're important. Here they're valued.

Comfort zone. The segregated setting of the school, according to several participants, fostered an atmosphere in which students experienced too much of a "comfort zone." Furthermore, they voiced concern that this comfort zone

might in fact hinder the students' future educational success.

Andy stated, "I think if you segregate Aboriginal people and just put them into one school, it's too much of a comfort zone." Ann agreed with Andy. She emphasized that "they are so protected in this environment that when they leave, they can't handle it." Drawing on a previous teaching assignment, Ann supported her point as follows: "A real good example was teaching at [a feeder high school].... The kids that have come out of [the school] washed out."

Basic Skills

In the discussion on deficiency in basic skills, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) continuity, and (b) politics.

Many participants claimed that students are deficient in many basic educational skills. In support, Alana pointed out, "You have children who are coming here who cannot read or write. So why are we teaching them science formulas when they can't read or write?" She further elaborated:

> The house is crumbling.... Unless you have a foundation, the whole building is going to crumble. They are not going to be successful in high school. If they can't read and write in junior high, they will never make it there. So they have one failure after the other.

Alana transferred the root of this problem to restrictions upon the school to adhere to provincial mandates regarding curriculum, and so on. She argued:

> It is not the teachers' fault, because they have to go by this curriculum. It is not the child's fault. So everybody is stressed because a child is not able to learn and the teacher is not able to teach. There is no rhythm.... As an example: You are trying to teach a child who has a Grade One reading level and maybe a Grade Two writing level, and you are trying to teach Grade Eight science.

In summation, Alana explained that educators, "are paid by a ... school district which says that you have to teach a certain curriculum. Teachers are bound by that curriculum."

In a similar vein, Calvin raised concern regarding pressure from the district to adhere to timelines that were not necessarily aligned with the school. He said, "Superintendents used to come around and ask, 'Where are you in math? I'm sorry, the rest of the district is on page one hundred and seventeen.'" Despite this, however, he argued that "you had to just forget all of that shit and say, 'I have to teach kids where they are at, not where they are supposed to be.'"

Continuity. Analysis of the interview transcripts identified a lack of continuity to be a challenge. More specifically, participants spoke of breakdowns in the continuity of expectations and standards among staff. As well, continuity of staff from year to year was emphasized.

Carol reported that the staff have recognized problems related to continuity and have recently begun to address it through a schoolwide professional development session. She clarified that this professional development initiative

resulted because "the staff needs to try and get some continuity from classroom to classroom so that these kids do not have certain expectations in one room, and then they come in here, where I have different expectations."

Cara confirmed Carol's assessment. However, she hypothesized that continuity in the school will remain a concern as long as high staff turnover rates continue. She reflected that "usually people stay at [the school] for three or four years, and then they transfer out; whereas in other schools, people stay for twenty years." Therefore, she concluded, "Some of the programs or activities that have been planned get dumped from year to year because there is not the same staff."

On the other hand, citing the high-stress conditions facing educators at the school, Carl recommended that to remain effective in the profession, educators transfer to another school after "three, four, five years, somewhere in that range, depending on the nature of the person."

Politics. Both Calvin and Anita maintained that politics within the Aboriginal community is a challenge. Furthermore, both argued that this problem has resulted in divisiveness between the school and the Aboriginal community. Describing the political climate of the school, Calvin claimed:

> Every group that we would bring in [introduced political concerns]. We brought in Elders from Driftpile who conflicted with [the school's]

> leadership and the support people we got from Blackfoot country. The people in Saddle Lake differed dramatically -- they were all Cree -- from the people in Driftpile.

District Disrespect

Disrespect from the district, and a subtheme, dumping ground, were highlighted as challenges. "I really feel that other people in our district, other principals, other teachers out there don't really understand what is happening here," revealed April. Cara agreed. Referring to perceived misunderstanding among district staff, she felt:

> They don't understand what goes on here. And they think in a way, because our students don't do well, it reflects on their teachers, that it is the teacher's fault, that all we really do around here is just try to keep students in their desks.

Cara then focused specifically on the disrespect that she perceived from her peers throughout the district:

> Disrespect in the fact that I think some people respect the fact that you can last at [the school], but I think disrespect in the fact that they don't think you are really teaching when you are there, ... because it would be so awful to be at this school. So that's what I find difficult also.

Dumping ground. The findings indicated that, over time, the school has evolved into a "dumping ground;" more specifically, a dumping ground for urban Aboriginal students who have been identified as "trouble makers" in other district schools. Cara bluntly summarized the consensus of the group through her charge that

> one of the problems is that our district does not support us in the fact that they are not encouraging

> Aboriginal kids in other schools, if they are *good*, to come to [the school]. If they are bad, however, "You go. You go to [the school]. That's where you belong." It's definitely a dumping ground. "If he's doing well, if he's not a problem, we'll keep him, because we get funding for him." But as soon as an Aboriginal kid is causing problems, not doing well, "Let's toss him to [the school]."

April supported Cara. Using a personal example, she shared a recent experience in which she declared

> I heard it with my own ears from a principal located a few blocks from here. She said, "You're not getting any of my Native students. I'm not sending any of my Native students to your school."... It seems like they are not even willing to make their students aware that [the school] exists unless they are having a problem. If they have a child they are having a problem with, who do they phone? They phone [the school].

Calvin agreed with both Cara and April. He confirmed the belief that the school had become a dumping ground. He had a hypothesis suggesting that Aboriginal students throughout the district who were experiencing difficulty were "lumped together by, I don't think evil people, but racist nonetheless."

Anita expanded on the points put forth thus far. She felt that the school has become a dumping ground not only with respect to the student population, but also with respect to supplies and other resources. This is interesting in that, because of the student funding mechanisms of the province, additional funding was being received by the district. Nevertheless, Anita contended that the school does not seem to benefit financially from this additional funding.

Resources

In addition to discussion on resources, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) inadequate programs and resources, and (b) fiscal feasibility.

A majority of the participants spoke of challenges resulting from money and budgetary concerns. Clint was blunt. Implying that there was more to the issue than I was able to discover through my research, he stated, "We don't have a budget. And last year we didn't have a budget." He further noted, "I can't get into that with you, as to why we don't have a budget. It doesn't make sense why." Both Alana and April confirmed Clint's feelings. Alana revealed that the school has "no money, so that's a problem."

In response, April detailed some of the fundraising tactics attempted, which have met with varying degrees of success. Addressing their financial predicament, she reflected:

> We have to rely on a casino.... We can't do fund raising with parents. We have tried it, but you can't do the typical selling chocolate bars and stuff like that. Those types of fund-raising things don't work here.

Inadequate programs and resources. The data stressed that programs and resources offered at the school were directly affected by the financial dilemma facing the school. Supporting the consensus of many participants, Cara lamented: "A lot of the programs that we would like to run because a lot of our kids might be fetal alcohol or have

ADHD or something where they need different programs to learn, we can't afford them."

An additional finding that emerged from the interviews was, as Carol reported, the inability to locate grade-level-appropriate curriculum materials. Furthermore, she claimed that there is a lack of appropriate resources to support Aboriginal culture.

Fiscal feasibility. From an administrative perspective, Carl acknowledged there have been fiscal restraints experienced throughout the district because of recent provincial funding cutbacks. As a result, he contended that the school "is financially not feasible." In elaboration, he maintained, "It is costing too much. It is costing more than thirty-six-eighty-six to educate a kid."

In addition, both Carl and Cara addressed the reality of the school's recent enrollment trends as contributing to this challenge. Reflecting on recent enrollment trends, Cara reported that this year, "Our enrollment is way down, way, way down." At the time of this research there were just under 150 pupils enrolled at the school. With this in mind, Carl estimated that the school needs "two hundred kids at least to keep viable."

Summary

This chapter presented findings that addressed the first research question. This question examined:

What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

The findings were presented in four sections. Each of these sections corresponds with the conceptual framework for this research as summarized in Figure 2.1. With this in mind, challenges were organized into the following categories: (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators.

The participants identified six themes related to student challenges. They were reported as (a) student learning preferences, (b) inconsistent student attendance, (c) student preparedness for school, (d) inability of students to adapt to a structured educational environment, (e) student behaviors, and (f) low student respect for education. Within several of these themes, subthemes emerged and were presented.

Regarding challenges associated with parents of urban Aboriginal students, three themes emerged. Participants reported the most significant challenges as (a) family poverty, (b) inadequate parenting skills, and (c) parental distrust of mainstream education. Once again, within several of these themes, subthemes emerged and were detailed.

Three themes and six subthemes relating to educator challenges were identified by the participants. The themes were: (a) educator cultural conflict, (b) high degrees of job-related stress, and (c) lack of cohesiveness among staff.

Exploring challenges associated with administrators, the participants identified five themes. They were presented as (a) the school's present mandate, (b) the practice of segregating Aboriginal students, (c) basic skill acquisition, (d) overall disrespect for the school as demonstrated by the district, and (e) scarcity of resources. As well, subthemes emerged and were reported for each theme.

The following chapter discusses the findings related to the first research question. The findings were examined in relation to the field work, literature, and my personal observations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS -- QUESTION 1

My purpose in this study was to identify and address challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children in an urban school. My intention in this chapter is to discuss and integrate the findings of Chapter IV with those of the field work, existing literature, and my observations. The findings are discussed in the sequence in which they were presented in the previous chapter.

Challenges Encountered With Students

Learning Styles

Consistent with the literature (e.g., Browne, 1990; Irvine & York, 1995; More, 1993; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Whyte, 1986; Wilgosh & Mulcahy, 1993), many participants claimed that Aboriginal students learn in ways different from the mainstream culture. However, one participant was hesitant to agree. Cam argued that the notion of a distinct Aboriginal learning style is "really a contentious issue" because of factors such as mixed racial marriages between Aboriginal and non-Native people and suggestions that there may be a genetic link between race and learning style. Cam's concern directly aligned with that of Banks (1995), who, in referring to the notion of an Aboriginal learning style, insisted that the issue is "a contentious one" (p. 16). In

addition, Cam's thoughts in many ways parallelled the positions advanced by researchers such as Johnson and Ramirez (1990), Kleinfeld (1975, 1979), Kleinfeld and Nelson (1991), Larose (1991), Pepper and Henry (1986), and Sawyer (1991). Cam's reflections also concurred with the assertions of Irvine and York (1995), Pepper and Henry (1986), and Wilgosh and Mulcahy (1993), who cautioned educators to be aware of the possibilities of stereotyping.

On the other hand, Cam was quick to acknowledge that test data collected throughout the district were congruous with the literature supporting the existence of an Aboriginal learning style. This was consistent with information related to me by the Manager of Division Monitoring of Edmonton Catholic Schools (personal correspondence, September 1997), who corroborated the literature, stressing that, for the most part, Aboriginal students in that district achieved higher scores than non-Native students did on the nonverbal components of the 1997 Canadian Test of Basic Skills.

Language barriers. Two participants emphasized language barriers as a challenge. Both participants who elaborated on this challenge were Aboriginal. One participant, Ann, strongly felt that because in the Aboriginal community English is the second language, urban Aboriginal children are learning "fractured" English. This finding paralleled the research of Clarke (1994) and Reyhner

(1994). Reyhner claimed that "Native students who appear to be proficient in English may have only conversational proficiency rather than the cognitive/academic proficiency required for successful school work" (p. 25).

Diversity. Concurring with the assertions of Johnson and Ramirez (1990) and Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), many participants identified the subtheme of cultural diversity among urban Aboriginal students as an educational challenge. Anita spoke from her heart when she stressed that it is vital that educators view Aboriginal students as unique individuals as opposed to viewing them as a group. This was reinforced by Johnson and Ramirez, who said that educators must "recognize that although Native cultures share many common values and practices, there are also distinct differences across groups" (p. 1). Furthermore, "there is no one set of characteristics that can be ascribed to all members of any ethnic group" (p. 12). Nevertheless, while it appears there is a call for cultural diversity, there is a need to recognize that in this urban school, English is the language of instruction.

Attendance

The majority of participants clearly indicated that student attendance and the subtheme of student transience were major educational challenges. This was reinforced by

Swisher and Hoisch (1992, p. 18), who stressed that there is a link between student attendance and student transience.

According to Mehana and Reynolds (1995), there is a correlation between student achievement and attendance. Cam was the only participant to link attendance to student achievement. In fact, Cam was the only participant to make any direct reference to student achievement, despite my probing of each of the 14 participants. Further compounding this issue was the existence of literature related to Aboriginal student achievement.

Transience. The literature (e.g., Brandt, 1992; Eberhard, 1989; National Education Association, 1987; Peters, 1987; Swisher & Hoisch, 1992; Swisher, Hoisch, & Pavel, 1991) concurred with the assertions of several participants that student transience is a major challenge with Aboriginal students. Neils (1971; as cited in Peters, 1987) commented that "one of the most visible and noted characteristics of Indians living in cities has been their mobility" (p. 22).

Highlighting the effects of Aboriginal student transience on their success in school, Swisher and Hoisch (1992) indicated that "research does concur that the high rate of student transfer places a heavy burden upon the school for providing consistency and stability to its students" (p. 19).

The literature clearly demonstrated a correlation between student transience and student achievement. Referring to a study that addressed the concerns of Aboriginal students attending Oregon's public schools, Swisher and Hoisch (1992) concluded that "mobility of the family decidedly plays a negative role in student achievement" (p. 18). Similarly, Eberhard (1989) insisted that student "mobility is a dangerous ingredient for failure" (p. 39). Summing up the sentiment of both, Swisher, Hoisch, and Pavel (1991) maintained that "from a practical point of view, [Aboriginal student] transfer and mobility may be a factor contributing to low academic achievement, non-attendance, and eventual school leaving precipitated by the school or the student" (p. 81).

Preparedness for School

The participants identified the theme of school preparedness, as well as the subthemes of (a) academic skills and attitudes, (b) home life, and (c) social skills.

Academic skills and attitudes. Some educators who had previous experience in other schools, both within and without the district, insisted that this concern was more prevalent in the case school. Corroborating this, Swisher and Hoisch (1992) referred to a recent study of Aboriginal children conducted by Arizona State University that found

that Aboriginal children had "low academic proficiency and specific deficiencies" (p. 17).

Home life. Consistent with the assertions of Gundersen (1986) and Swisher and Hoisch (1992), there was overwhelming consensus among the participants that the home lives of the students were a significant contributor to their lack of preparedness. Moreover, the participants empathized with and understood the students. Several used the term *chaotic* to describe the home lives of most of the students. The vast majority had considerable knowledge of and insight into students' home lives. This appeared to result from effective communication between students and educators, as well as between educators. This is further elaborated on later in this study.

Social skills. The participants had mixed perceptions of the students' social skills. Some were critical of the students' apparent lack of social skills and were quick to identify them as a significant challenge. Powless and Elliott (1993) discussed this in terms of the influence of culture on social skills. They claimed that "children who live in differing cultures or subcultures of ... society often have problems adjusting to the requirements of public institutions" (p. 293).

In light of this, Ann questioned whether there might be cultural misconceptions among educators regarding this

issue. Although she acknowledged that students' social skills were weak, she suspected that some participants, many of whom were from the mainstream culture, may have "misinterpreted" the actions of students. Ann's view appeared to be consistent with that of Carr and Klassen (1997), who said, "By placing more importance on behaviour,... [teachers] adversely affect racial minority children, who may not act in conformity with the teacher's culture" (p. 69).

Structure

The vast majority of participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, agreed on the importance of establishing and maintaining a structured educational environment. However, at the same time it is important that educators resist imposing their beliefs and judgement on this situation. This was reinforced by Corson (1991), who asserted that "when majority culture educators look at minority children they tend to focus on what those children lack" (p. 28). As a result, "this lack becomes the focus of the schooling that they offer those children" (p. 28).

Although unrelated, there is a risk that some may misinterpret participant claims regarding the need for structure as a contradiction of their belief that educators must be flexible, which they mentioned as a strategy elaborated on later in this study.

Behaviors

Analysis of the interview transcripts clearly identified student behavior as a challenge. The participants also noted five subthemes related to student behavior: (a) gang involvement, (b) disrespect, (c) self-esteem, (d) trust and testing, and (e) effects of addictions.

Many participants were quick to emphasize that the types and frequency of negative behaviors exhibited by students were unique to this school. Many attributed at least part of this to district practices of assigning to the case school Aboriginal students who had previous histories of misbehavior at other district schools. This appears consistent with the position maintained by Alberta Education (1987a), which claimed that a lack of cultural awareness on the part of many educators results in a "lack of tolerance and understanding of the attitudes and behaviour of Native students" (p. 19). This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

An additional finding that emerged involved two participants' concerns regarding student violence toward educators. The literature (e.g., MacDougall, 1993; Petersen, Pietrzak, & Speaker, 1996; Quarles, 1993) confirmed this. As a result of consultation with various Canadian teachers' associations and task forces, MacDougall affirmed that "increasingly, teachers find themselves faced with students who are angry, disrespectful and abusive" (p. 15).

Gang involvement. The findings revealed that some of the out-of-school activities of several urban Aboriginal students, especially gang involvement, were challenges. This finding was not discussed in the literature but was deemed significant by the participants.

A great deal of empathy appeared to exist among participants. Responses ranged from understanding to justifying these behaviors. Justifying gang involvement, Ann was adamant in identifying gang involvement as unique to urban Aboriginal students. Explaining her point, she contrasted urban life of Aboriginal children to life on the reserve, contending that on the reserve children are "safe." Consequently, she insisted that in urban settings students tend to congregate in gangs as a means of "survival."

Disrespect. The subtheme of disrespect appears new in light of a lack of literature. However, several participants deemed it significant. Although emphasized by both Aboriginal and Caucasian educators, student disrespect received the harshest criticism from Aboriginal staff. Ann and Austin were most distressed in that, as Ann said, "respect is supposed to be number one" in Aboriginal culture, and the types of behaviors they regularly witnessed were incongruent with this. Strategies identified to address this challenge are presented further on in this study.

Self-esteem. Consistent with the assertions of Danyluk (1996), Gilland (1988), and Turner-Laliberte (1993), several participants identified student self-esteem as a challenge. For the most part, they concurred with Gilland and Turner-Laliberte, who contended that educators of Aboriginal students must facilitate increased student self-esteem prior to emphasizing scholastic achievement. Strategies used by educators to address this concern are highlighted later in this study.

Whereas other participants indirectly equated student self-esteem with behavior, Cara was the only one to suggest a direct correlation between the two. She felt that student self-esteem voids were responsible for much of students' negative behavior. She hypothesized that these negative behaviors were a type of defence mechanism used by the students.

Trust and testing. On the basis of the findings, it appeared that a lack of trust on the part of students was a significant challenge. In addition, educators emphasized that until trust between students and educators is established, a high degree of testing of educators' authority occurs.

Although many maintained that this situation was more profound in the case school than in others both within and without the district, the participants hesitated to attribute this finding to cultural influences. Instead, they

considered this challenge to be more likely the result of the home lives of many of the students.

Effects of addictions. Discussion of the effects of addictions was approached by the participants in two ways. First, they described the challenge of students dealing with addictions. Andy emphasized that this challenge is not necessarily limited to students themselves using addictive substances, but that many urban Aboriginal students are also having to cope with family members who are addicted. This was reinforced by Swisher and Hoisch (1992), who said that Aboriginal children are challenged by issues relating to "substance abuse, both student and parental" (p. 17).

Second, the physiological effects of addictions -- specifically, fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, attention deficit disorder, and substance-abuse-related learning disabilities -- were clearly identified by the participants as significant challenges.

Respect for Education

The participants related a disrespect for education, as well as two subthemes, (a) absence of goals and (b) marginalized people, to have an interesting impact on both Aboriginal and Caucasian educators. Whereas Caucasian educators such as Carol were grappling with a *solution* to this problem, Aboriginal educators such as Ann were more inclined to reflect on the root cause. Alberta Education

(1987b), which was more aligned with Carol's standpoint, provided suggestions as to how the mainstream education system can and should solve the dilemma.

Ogbu's (1993) classification of Aboriginal peoples as "involuntary minorities" (p. 92) casts light upon Ann's concerns. According to Ogbu, "Involuntary minorities tend to equate school learning with the learning of the white ... cultural frame of reference and to equate following the standard practices and related activities of the school ... with 'acting white'" (p. 102). With this in mind, perhaps this lack of respect for education is passed down to urban Aboriginal students from their parents and grandparents.

Absence of goals. Consistent with the assertions of Swisher, Hoisch, and Pavel (1991) and Swisher and Hoisch (1992), analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that several participants felt that there was an absence of long-term goals among the students. Interestingly, all of these participants were of Aboriginal descent. Furthermore, all were female.

Once again, the scope and diversity of the educators' comments offered various insights and explanations for this finding. They proposed various theories to explain this challenge, ranging from student depression to learned helplessness. Although April was the only educator to state directly that this challenge may be the result of cultural influences, others alluded to cultural impetus but were more

inclined to explain this issue as being fuelled by forces external to Aboriginal culture, especially by their home lives and poverty.

Marginalized people. The subtheme of marginalized people was identified by several participants as a challenge. Once again, Cam, among many, emphasized the home life of the students as the major force behind this challenge. Alan and Calvin made statements that were consistent with those of Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas (1990), who stressed that urban Aboriginal people are under considerable pressure to conform with the dominant, mainstream culture. Alan offered considerable credibility and insight, based on his cultural understanding as well as on his own experience. He argued that this predicament was further complicated by the negative influences on urban Aboriginal children of non-Native people in the inner city.

Challenges Encountered With Parents

Poverty

Several participants clearly identified poverty and issues related to poverty as major challenges. Many were eager to clarify their belief that poverty and dysfunction are two very separate and distinct issues.

An additional finding that emerged was Cam's and Clint's notions that poverty and student attendance were connected. Both affirmed that many students were not

attending school on a regular basis because "they can't afford a bus pass." This paralleled Clarke (1994), who noted that "tardiness and absenteeism among ... Indian youth are often the result of home situations" (p. 57).

Parenting Skills

The majority of the participants indicated that parenting skills were a major challenge. As well, the participants identified three related subthemes: (a) the vicious circle, (b) marginalized people, and (c) addictions.

Although in some respects the findings corroborated the assertions of Pepper and Henry (1986) and Whyte (1986), in more ways they seem to contradict them. Several participants characterized the home lives of the majority of the students as "chaotic." Even though Pepper and Henry contended that in the Aboriginal community "child rearing practices have been labelled by traditional European standards as permissive" (p. 55), the concerns discussed by the participants go beyond cultural misunderstanding on the part of educators. It seems that this inference is further justified in that the strongest criticisms of parenting skills came from Aboriginal educators who were familiar with traditional Aboriginal parenting practices.

The vicious circle. Alan felt that within the urban Aboriginal community a cycle of poor parenting skills results from transience, a lack of goals, and "despair"

among parents. These conditions, he thought, contributed to parenting-skill concerns.

This theory was reinforced by French (1992) and Timpson (1995). Commenting on the state of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada, Timpson concluded that

> much of the recent literature written by Native persons acknowledges serious family dysfunction, recommends early detection, and delimits tertiary child welfare services. The proportion of Native indicators supports such approaches. The proportion of Native children is ten times the proportion of non-Native children who live out of their own homes for their protection; the proportion of Native children is seven times the proportion of non-Native children who commit suicide; wife abuse among Native persons is said to be at least seven times the national average; mass disclosures of previously hidden child sexual abuse have been made. These conditions reflect generations of cultural and spiritual destruction. These problems are not individual problems requiring individual approaches. (p. 540)

Marginalized people. According to Cam and Alan, Aboriginal parenting skills are directly influenced by parental understanding of and involvement in their culture. This has become a challenge for many Aboriginal parents because, in many cases, Aboriginal families who have relocated to urban centers have experienced a distancing from their culture. Moreover, they have been placed under considerable pressure, as Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas (1990, p. 129) explained, to adopt the values of the dominant culture.

Addictions. All three of the participants who identified this challenge were of Aboriginal descent. Challenges resulting from parental addiction to alcohol, drugs, and gambling were discussed. Consistent with the assertions of French (1992) and Swisher and Hoisch (1992), this issue was described as both a result of and a contributor to concerns with parenting skills.

Distrust of Mainstream Education

The findings indicate that parental distrust of mainstream education, and a subtheme, parental defensiveness, were identified as challenges. The literature (e.g., Atleo, 1991; Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Ogbu, 1993) concurred with these findings.

The participants characterized the magnitude of parental distrust as ranging from suspicion to downright loathing of the school. This is consistent with the research of Ogbu (1993), who claimed that "there are complex community forces that make it more difficult for involuntary minorities to overcome ... [predominantly] the oppositional nature of their cultural frame of reference and identity" (p. 101).

Some participants hypothesized that the origin of this predicament stems from the residential schools. In fact, one of the educators whom I interviewed was a student of residential schools. In a candid, steadfast manner, she shared not only her disapproval of that system, but also her

empathy with the resultant distrust of many parents. This parallels the findings of Atleo (1991), who wrote that "the history of Native education in Canada has been a trauma" (p. 1).

Defensiveness. Related to parental distrust was the finding suggesting that Aboriginal parents are often defensive with respect to mainstream education. This, according to April, may be the result of Aboriginal parents constantly being judged against mainstream, majority cultural standards, the result of which in many cases is defensiveness and resentment.

This theory was reinforced by Ogbu (1993), who stated that

> involuntary minorities tend to equate school learning with the learning of the white ... cultural frame of reference and to equate following the standard practices and related activities of the school that enhance academic success and social adjustment with "acting white." (p. 102)

Challenges Encountered With Educators

Educator Cultural Conflict

The theme of educator cultural conflict, as well as the subthemes (a) lack of preparedness and (b) cultural misunderstandings, emerged as a result of the analysis of the interview transcripts.

The literature (e.g., Alberta Education, 1987; Johnson & Ramirez, 1990; Tamas, 1982) agreed with the findings

highlighting the need for cultural-awareness opportunities for staff. The strategies that evolved and were used by educators to address this challenge are detailed later in this study.

Lack of preparedness. Two participants stressed that many educators came to the school ill-prepared to serve the educational needs of urban Aboriginal students. Though neither directly assigned responsibility of this predicament to teacher-preparation programs, they referred to them indirectly.

The findings reflect the need for preparation of educators in both cultural and pedagogical areas to assist them in better aligning with Aboriginal students. The literature (e.g., Alberta Education, 1987a; Avery & Walker, 1993; Mendenhall, 1982; Sikkema & Niyekawa, 1987; Warnica, 1986) confirmed this. For example, Alberta Education recommended that educators of Aboriginal students "receive pre-service and/or inservice relative to Native cultures.... Inservice is also needed in preferred instructional methods for Native students" (p. 19). In a similar vein, Avery and Walker stressed that "teachers who have not had the opportunity to develop their awareness, knowledge, and skills at working with diverse populations will be inadequately prepared" (p. 28).

Kleinfeld (1992) was cautious to endorse this view, claiming that it was inappropriate to conclude that specific

teaching styles are effective with Aboriginal students. However, Kleinfeld, Williamson-McDiarmid, Grubis, and Parrett (1983) asserted that, "fundamentally, effective teachers are believed to adopt a culturally congruent teaching style" (p. 90).

Cultural misunderstandings. The subtheme of cultural misunderstandings emerged from the comments of several participants. Andy summarized the feelings of many with his contention that some educators were "too sensitive" and "too careful" when working with Aboriginal students. Many felt that this resulted in educators lowering their standards and failing to hold students accountable for their learning. Addressing this concern, Kleinfeld (1972, 1975) recommended that educators hold students accountable and maintain high expectations for them, while at the same time establishing personal relationships with them. These suggestions are further discussed later in this study.

It appears that this finding in many ways parallels those of Wayson and Pinnell (1977; as cited in Avery & Walker, 1993), who claimed that "educators' own childhood, professional preparation, and career experiences give them a view of themselves, the world, and their profession that prevents them from comprehending both the essential strengths of minority children and the reforms necessary for educating them" (p. 29). Alberta Education (1987a), Corson (1991), and Johnson and Ramirez (1990) lent further support.

Job-Related Stress

The theme of job-related stress, and one subtheme, role diversity, emerged as a result of the data analysis. Nevertheless, the contributing factors suggested by the participants were not congruent with those discussed in the literature. Participants focused their comments on the high demand placed on them by the perceived "neediness" of the students, whereas the literature (e.g., Brownell & Smith, 1993; Danyluk, 1996; Hawthorn, 1967) focused primarily on stress resulting from the effects of student inconformity, believed to result from incompatible teaching methods.

Role diversity. Consistent with the assertions of Hutton (1992) and Savoie (1992), both Clint and Calvin believed role diversity to be a significant challenge. Each thought that he was expected to perform duties that were outside the usual realm of his administrative role.

Clint's and Calvin's notions were inconsistent, however, with those of Mitchell (1980), who asserted that junior administrators "serve in many capacities. They play the role of nurse, teacher, secretary, cafeteria worker, custodian, and many others" (p. 29).

Perhaps this resulted from the size of the school rather than the type of school. Furthermore, perhaps Clint and Calvin, who both served in administrative capacities at the school, would have experienced the same circumstances in another district school with a comparable enrollment.

According to Buser (1991; as cited in Hutton, 1992), junior administrative roles are determined by such factors as size of the school. Moreover, it is possible that because this was Clint's first administrative assignment, he might not have been overly familiar with the expectations of the role. This was confirmed by Savoie (1992), who claimed that junior administrators "exhibited a fair amount of diversity regarding their expectations and the role they found" (p. 32).

Staff Cohesion

Staff cohesion, as well as the subthemes (a) reluctant staff, (b) racism, and (c) reverse racism, were discussed by the participants. Several indicated that there was tension among staff members at the school. Two were quite adamant that the nature of this matter was severe. This finding contradicts the discussion, as presented later in this study, generated by the participants describing the "family feelings" and interdependence among staff at the school as strategies that evolved to address educator challenges.

Reluctant staff. Two participants reported frustration with what they perceived to be a district practice of assigning staff to the school who were neither prepared for nor wished to serve urban Aboriginal students. They believed that some educators were "exiled" to the school. This practice not only had a detrimental impact on both student

and staff morale, but also contributed to some of the challenges identified in this study.

Racism. Participants approached the challenge of racism in two ways. First, several spoke of some educators' racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people. This paralleled the assertions of Alberta Education (1987a), which claimed that some educators of Aboriginal children "lack tolerance and understanding ... of Native students". (p. 19).

Cara's comments were, once again, focused on the district practice of "dumping" people at the school. A major result of this practice, she maintained, was assigning "racist" people to the school. She asserted that often these educators had the preconceived notion that "they're Native kids. They're going to pass? Give me a break!" This is consistent with Wilson (1991), who wrote, "Many times, even before the teachers knew the [Aboriginal] students, they prejudged them" (p. 379).

Reverse racism. Four participants, two Aboriginal and two Caucasian, claimed that the racist attitudes of Aboriginal staff were a challenge. Examples of reverse racism directed at both students and Caucasian staff were detailed. Nonetheless, both April and Alan acknowledged that this concern existed, but adamantly expressed their condemnation of it.

This finding reflects the need for further education of Aboriginal staff, possibly in the form of professional development addressing issues of tolerance and cultural diversity. This was reinforced by Tamas (1982), who maintained that for an authentic, mutual understanding of Aboriginal education to occur, "education is required for both groups" (p. 46).

Challenges Encountered With Administrators

School Mandate

Many participants identified the school mandate and one subtheme, cultural voids, as educational challenges. Recurring comments suggested that since the inception of the school program over 15 years ago, there has been a steady and growing inconsistency between the philosophy of the original Aboriginal education program and what is actually happening. This theme is significant because it seemed to permeate participant comments throughout the interviews. Further, this concern was highlighted by educators at both the school and the district levels.

This finding may be attributable, at least in part, to the significant degree of administrative staff rotation that both the district and the school have experienced since the inception of the school's program. This is consistent with the literature (e.g., Farrell, 1994; Hicks, 1993; Sydora,

1994), which emphasized the critical role of the principal in influencing the mandate of a school.

Cultural voids. Several participants raised the concern of cultural voids. Some comments, such as Austin's, were critical of the current spiritual and cultural programming offered at the school; he claimed that it was "tacked on" and superficial. It appeared that there were other issues beyond the scope of this study between Austin and various school personnel.

On the other hand, Cam commented that the cultural programming at the school was inconsistent. This perception was more aligned with those of other participants. Nevertheless, at the time of this study the school offered Aboriginal spiritual and cultural programs that appeared to align with Alberta Education's (1987a) recommendations, which advised that Aboriginal people want the implementation of "cultural support programs within the public schools" (p. 10).

Segregation

Along with one subtheme, comfort zone, the participants perceived segregation to be a challenge. The participants reported mixed perceptions of this issue. Ann, although expressing disapproval with the practice of segregation, conceded that "maybe [Aboriginal children] are better off in a school like this."

Perhaps the strongest argument was offered by April. She recounted her evolution in attitude towards segregation over the many years that she had served the school, detailing her metamorphosis from condemning the segregation of urban Aboriginal students at the beginning of her tenure to total support of the practice. She was adamant, stating that "these are kids who wouldn't survive anywhere else." She concurred with Wilson (1991), who maintained that in heterogenous schools "the overwhelming frustration and isolation of [Aboriginal] students affects their academic performance.... Some become involved in fights and their grades drop, and some appear apathetic" (p. 379).

Comfort zone. The findings indicate that several participants were concerned that the school fostered an atmosphere that pampered students to the point that they would not be able to function in other educational settings. This finding contradicts the aforementioned support of segregation expressed by both Ann and April. Furthermore, this finding runs contrary to those of Wilson (1991), who held that Aboriginal students have difficulty functioning in heterogenous schools.

Basic Skills

In addition to the theme of basic skills, two subthemes emerged as a result of the data analysis: (a) continuity and (b) politics.

Discussion of this issue revolved around the restrictions placed on the school to adhere to external educational mandates that, in the eyes of Alana and Calvin, were preventing the school from meeting the unique educational needs of urban Aboriginal students. Both Alana and Calvin transferred the burden of this challenge to the district. As Alana said, "It is not the teachers' fault." Further, she claimed that educators are accountable to a "school district which says that you have to teach a certain curriculum."

This paralleled Hampton (1995) who stressed that "even with Native control, most of the [educational] structures, methods, content, and faculty remain predominantly non-Native" (p. 10). Therefore, according to Lipka (1994), Aboriginal schools must take the onus of negotiating with districts "to decide what constitutes schooling: whose knowledge should be taught, how should that knowledge be accessed, and who should decide these matters" (p. 92).

Nonetheless, perhaps it is inappropriate to place the responsibility for this issue on the district. It would seem that the district simply adhered to provincial educational regulations and mandates.

Continuity. Two participants voiced their frustration with both the lack of continuity among the staff with respect to instructional and student-conduct expectations and the high staff turnover. This challenge appears to be a

"Catch-22" in that, as the participants theorized, the transient nature of the staff contributed to the breakdown of continuity among staff. Etzioni (1964; as cited in Keis, 1967) asserted that staff cohesion "requires a certain amount of stability in membership of the group, since too much turnover prevents the growth of mutual emotional investment" (p. 6). Alternatively, it could be argued that the staff transiency, in many respects, resulted from educator frustration with the lack of continuity among staff.

Furthermore, these concerns are not limited to this particular school. This matter was deemed by the participants to be a significant challenge; however, it was not unique to urban Aboriginal education.

Politics. Although no specific literature was identified that corroborated politics as an issue, Calvin and Anita deemed it to be significant. Each claimed that because the school serves students from various Aboriginal communities and cultural backgrounds, friction among groups regularly occurs. These conflicts, according to Calvin, interfered with the operation of the school.

District Disrespect

District disrespect and one subtheme, dumping ground, were discussed as challenges. The notion of disrespect from the district was reinforced by Lipka (1994) who asserted

that "the colonial legacy of schooling in indigenous contexts has been amply documented as an imposed system of education that views indigenous language and culture as barriers to Western schooling" (p. 73).

Consistent with the assertions of Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), Lipka (1994), and Vold (1989), April and Cara believed that the district lacked respect for the school. Further, they perceived a devaluing of the schools' staff by their peers. Even though they did not specifically use the terms *prejudiced* or *racist* in their description of the district, their reflections hinted at these possibilities. This confirmed the research of Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), who wrote that the "common practices of many schools have either directly or indirectly devalued Native ways" (p. 1).

Dumping ground. The participants clearly identified the school as a "dumping ground" for urban Aboriginal students who had experienced academic and behavioral difficulties in other district schools. In fact, the participants were adamant on this issue.

If indeed this finding is accurate, this practice clearly contradicts the mandate of the school, one endorsed by the district. As well, this practice, at the very least, is a major contributor to many of the behavioral challenges encountered at the school.

Resources

The majority of the participants reported the schools' lack of financial resources as a major challenge. In addition, several participants identified two related subthemes: (a) inadequate programs and resources and (b) fiscal feasibility.

Clint's comment that "we don't have a budget. And last year we didn't have a budget.... I can't get into that with you, as to why we don't have a budget. It doesn't make sense why" was intriguing. I did not pursue this subject, noting both Clint's anxiety and the limitations of this study. Nonetheless, many participants concurred with Clint that the financial resources available at the school were extremely limited.

Inadequate programs and resources. Several participants expressed concern regarding a shortage of appropriate curricular programs and supplemental resources. They felt that this challenge existed simply as a direct result of a lack of money. This is most unfortunate in that, because of the less-than-ideal academic histories and abilities of many students, one would assume that this school would receive an abundance of these resources.

Fiscal feasibility. Carl proclaimed that the school at that time was "not financially feasible." This casts light on the previously mentioned challenges respecting resources.

With the current enrollment at under 150 students, Carl estimated that the school required at least 50 additional students "to keep viable."

In light of this, both Carl and Cara pointed out that over the past several years student "enrollment is way down; way, way down." Further complicating this dilemma were recent provincial government funding reductions to education.

Summary

In this chapter the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school were discussed. The discussion was based primarily on the literature; however, references to the field work and my observations were also incorporated.

The literature supported the findings from the six themes related to student challenges, as well as most of the subthemes. Discussion on learning styles was unique in that the literature both supported and refuted the findings.

In reference to challenges associated with parents of urban Aboriginal students, the literature supported all themes and subthemes that emerged from the analyses of the data. With respect to the discussion on the parenting skills of Aboriginal parents, although there was some agreement between the findings of this study and those of the literature, there also seemed to be some discrepancy.

Educator challenges yielded three themes and six subthemes. With the exception of the theme of staff cohesion and the subtheme of reluctant staff, the literature corroborated the findings. Inconsistencies were found between the findings in this study and those of some of the literature with respect to the following subthemes: educators' lack of preparedness and educator role diversity. Furthermore, there were contradictions between the discussion that suggested that there were concerns with staff cohesiveness and the participants' reporting of a family-like atmosphere and interdependence amongst staff, which were reported as strategies elsewhere in this study.

Because many of the findings identified as administrator challenges were unique and specific to the school, the literature cited was more general in nature. Moreover, several of the findings appeared new in light of a lack of literature.

The following chapter presents the findings pertaining to Research Questions 2 and 3.

CHAPTER VI

STRATEGIES EVOLVED AND USED BY EDUCATORS IN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL SCHOOL

The purpose of this chapter is to address the second and third research questions:

What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified, and
How did these strategies evolve?

The data presented in this chapter are organized in five sections. The first four sections address the conceptual framework. The findings are presented under the headings (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major findings related to Question 2 and Question 3.

Strategies Used With Students

Six themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) relationships, (b) high expectations, (c) flexibility, (d) curriculum and instruction, (e) social skills and respect, and (f) racism.

Relationships

Responding to several aforementioned student challenges, chiefly self-esteem, lack of student trust, and student testing of authority, the participants reported that strategies that enhance relationships between students and educators were effective. In the discussion on

relationships, six subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) trust, (b) patience, (c) democratic interaction, (d) friendships, (e) above and beyond the call, and (f) humor.

The vast majority of the participants believed that a major key to working successfully with urban Aboriginal students is the building of relationships. According to Alana, "If there is no relationship, nothing happens." Cam concurred. He affirmed that "relationships are everything. The kids won't work for you if they don't like you." He maintained that "relationship is everything in Indian country, making a connection."

With this in mind, Calvin shared a strategy that he had used as an administrator with staff new to the school. He noted that

> every time I meet a new teacher I talk about winning over, and I don't know two words that are more important for a teacher. You cut your discipline problems in half, your management problems in half; everything is cut in half by just standing at the door in the morning and [saying] "Nice haircut" and "You have new shoes," "Did you guys win last night?"

Calvin added that this strategy evolved "out of a survival method rather than out of any sense of brilliance or teaching or arriving at this conclusion over a period of time."

Carol revealed that she evolved relationship strategies from readings and university course work in Aboriginal education. Alana credited her insights to various Elders.

She confirmed Carol's claim by stating, "I learned things in school." However, "the Elders told me about caring and that you have to do that with families and kids."

Carol and Clint felt that an effective strategy for fostering relationship building is to be genuinely interested in the students. Reflecting on how he had developed a relationship with the students, Clint said, "I think that the kids here could see that I was genuinely interested, caring, and honest, so there was a relationship right away."

Calvin and Adriana cited personal warmth as a strategy that they used for building relationships. They both mentioned that they are "huggers." Calvin professed that "I'm a hugger; I am a very physical person." Adriana attributed the evolution of this strategy to her students. She explained that "there are things that the kids are teaching me, like hugs.... That's a strategy *they* taught me."

The majority of the participants spoke of the negative effects of confrontation as a strategy. According to Alana, confrontation "does not work with most Native people." Elaborating on Alana's point, April too thought that

> as soon as you try and use power with these kids, you lose them. And there are teachers here who use power and think that they are going to bash students into conforming, but I don't think it is effective.

Trust. The data identified the earning of trust as a strategy. Calvin stated:

> I dealt with a lot of damaged kids that I ended up just inadvertently counselling or being led to the information about how many kids had been abused in their past and that type of thing: being a very, very safe adult. I was always conscious that I was one person that was going to be a safe adult in their eyes at all times,... and that was a strategy.

In a similar vein, Alan put forth a strategy he used with a specific student to earn her trust:

> I've got a girl in [my class] who is very, very angry. Now, I know that when she goes home she gets screamed at and hollered at and called down and what have you. So she will get mad and she'll have very, very loud outbursts, and I will just let it go on, I'll let it go on. I won't contact the office; I'll just let it go on. I'll say, "Just keep going" basically. And then she will finish. She will run out of steam, and she will be mad; you will see a wall twenty miles high. I'm not going to do anything then, but later on I will ask, "Are you still angry?" and she will say, "No." ... Then you can start the process. Then you can say, "Well, gee, did you sleep last night?" or something. And then the kid is more reasonable because she trusts then.

Reflecting on the teachings of her grandparents, Ann claimed that "trust and respect go together." With this in mind, Adriana asserted that urban Aboriginal students are "more sensitive to what you say to them, to how you act, how you respond to fairness and the whole thing." Cara agreed with Ann and Adriana. She regarded extracurricular activities as an effective strategy for gaining the trust of students. This strategy allowed her to "get to know the kids outside of the classroom."

Patience. The findings indicate that an effective strategy with urban Aboriginal students is patience. Adriana noted that in addition to relationship building,

> just really trying to keep a rapport with [students] and saying, "Here, let me help you," and to be patient, because you know they are going to blow or you know they're having mixed feelings as they're quiet, sitting there, and to just wait and wait, and "Is this a good time for me to help you now?" I just find patience is so important, and sometimes I start praying, "Oh, God, don't let me lose it."

She attributed the evolution of this strategy to experience, consulting other educators, and reading.

A strategy that does not work, according to Adriana, is yelling at or reacting to students. She argued that

> you don't react; you cannot yell. And every once in a while you hear yourself yelling. It just does not work, because then they're yelling, they're yelling at each other for the rest of the day, so you have to keep calm and really try and understand.

April corroborated Adriana's statement. She contended that "with our people you have to use a very gentle approach." In addition, she emphasized that "I don't ever remember being yelled at as a child, and I don't yell at my child, and so I don't yell at students; I just never would."

Democratic interaction. The data identified the strategy of using democracy in relations with students. Andy described this process as forging partnerships. In referring to urban Aboriginal education, he maintained that "as far as I'm concerned,... there is a partnership between the

educators and the students. And if it's not looked on as a partnership, you're screwed."

Adriana used the metaphor of a hockey team to describe the partnership between students and educators. She said, "I always think of us as like a hockey team; we will gel. A group needs to gel together ... like a unit."

With this in mind, both Alana and Alan cautioned that an ineffective strategy with urban Aboriginal students is, as Alana stated, "that linear way of doing things: The kids all in a row and [the teacher] up at the front with the book does not seem to work." Similarly, Alan insisted, "The traditional '50s approach to education where 'I am the supreme authority, the teacher, and you will respect me,' ... it does not work." In light of this, Ann surmised that "a strategy that I use unconsciously,... I guess it's just in me, to see the kids, 'You are a person, I'm a person. Let's talk.'" Moreover, she explained,

> It's not the teacher thing: I'm teacher, I'm boss and whatnot. It's more, "I'm older than you are." That is the concept I work on, because in Native culture the old way, the adults, you had to respect your elders, even if they were just a few years older than you.

Ann felt that this strategy evolved from her own life experience. She mentioned, "I was brought up by my grandparents. [Aboriginal culture] has been ingrained in me since I was six years old."

Friendships. Several participants suggested developing friendships with their students as a strategy. Pointing out the bond that has resulted from her extracurricular efforts, April reported, "I work really closely with about fifteen girls, and I have a real relationship with them. They call me Mom, and they come to me whenever they have a problem." Using her mature age to her advantage, Ann remarked that "I treat [students] like my own." She believed that this strategy evolved as a result of experience and having raised her own children.

Above and beyond the call. The vast majority of the participants emphasized the importance of devoting extra time and heart to their position. According to Cam,

> If those kids feel that a person likes them, which is a key component, they actually spend time with them, and that nonteaching time is incredibly important to our kids, the time you spend just doing other stuff: reading a paper, having lunch with a kid.

In a similar vein, Alan said:

> I eat breakfast in the morning [with students]. At lunch time I'm never in the staff room; I haven't been in there for two years now. I'm in with the kids, and right after I'm in the hallways; we're playing hackeysack or playing with the ball in the gym or whatever.

Clint agreed with both Cam and Alan. He maintained that "when I'm sitting having lunch with [students], I'm giving them some tidbits or suggestions.... It's a matter that you spend time with those kids and find out, 'What leads to this?'"

From a counselling perspective, both Andy and Alana shared strategies that they used. Andy asserted that

> I'm going to go to bat for kids, to no end. If that means driving them to the AADAC Adolescent Treatment Centre, then that's what I've got to do! And if it takes me into eight o'clock at night, that's what I've got to do.

Referring to a counselling strategy she had recently used, Alana recalled that

> all the [students] in Grade 5 and 6 brought their bears and stuffed animals. I said to a child, to Francis, "Why didn't you bring yours?" and he said, "I don't have any." And so somehow or other the conversation got around to that I would buy him a little teddy bear. So then he got his two little buddies who were also in the same class, and they didn't have teddy bears, so the three boys and I went out to buy teddy bears. And they were just ecstatic about these bears. And then we went to Dairy Queen and we had pop, and I learned all kinds of things about these children in the hour we were gone.... I said, "Teddy bears are kind of neat." Then somehow we started talking about Christmas, and they told me they had a terrible Christmas, and their parents got wasted and [so on]. I learned volumes.

Humor. The data indicate that the majority of the participants identified humor as a strategy. Calvin claimed that humor is "absolutely vital" when working with Aboriginal people. He further added, from his experience, that "Native people have the greatest sense of humor in the world; they just love to laugh." Carol concurred with Calvin. She verified that "Native people really respond well to humor,... kids and adults, all of them. We laugh a lot in here, and we make jokes a lot."

Calvin used an example to illustrate the effectiveness of humor in diffusing potentially difficult situations. He recounted:

> I remember a short story we had to read ... when I used to teach. It was something like "You Lather a Person Before You Shave Them."... And I'd say in the classroom, as I would say in the discipline office, that "You know, for such a good-looking kid, you've really screwed up this time." I've just disarmed them,... rather than saying "You screwed up." Then confrontation starts. And I learned that as a survival method.... It is a counselling method; it's also part of my hedonism, that I want to seek pleasure in life, and why would I arrange a confrontation when I could get the same results with laughter?

High Expectations

Within this broad category three subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) structure, (b) goals, and (c) rewards.

The majority of participants maintained that having high expectations of their students was an effective strategy to address such student challenges as preparedness, structure, behaviors, and respect for education. Cara reflected that "I think they know that I actually care and I want them to learn and I want them to do well and I expect them to do well." She further asserted, "It's pure racism, it's pure laziness if I don't challenge every kid in the classroom." In a similar vein, Carol stressed, "You always have to have high standards and high expectations with these guys. I think they know if you don't think they can do it."

When asked how this strategy evolved, Cara referred to past teaching experiences in other districts. She contended that "things I learned in other schools I just basically apply here. And I have to modify it a little bit, but not much." With this in mind, she offered her opinion as to why some educators have difficulty with urban Aboriginal students. She stated:

> I observe what is happening in some other classrooms, and I see how the kids react, and I know why: because there are no expectations. So I will always keep it to a level that is high enough so that they want to do well; any kid wants to do well.

Structure. The data indicate that a highly structured learning environment is an effective strategy. The participants identified both classroom and school structure in their discussion. Reinforcing the staff belief in the importance of structure, many participants informed me that the school had recently conducted a professional development workshop addressing continuity throughout the school.

Carol thought that the students wanted and preferred a structured environment. Emphasizing the unstructured home lives of many urban Aboriginal students, she claimed that

> I change things all the time. We do different things, but there is a lot of structure that has to stay here.... When you come from chaos into here, there has to be continuity here. For some of our kids, this is the only continuity they get in their lives.... [Students] prefer us to be structured.

Andy agreed; however, he advised that "we have to have structure, but then, as educators of Aboriginal children, we have to meet them halfway."

Goals. Several participants said that they have attempted to practice goal setting with students. When working with students, April shared that "I am constantly trying to make them think about ten years from now, five years from now: Where are you going to be? What do you want to have? Where do you want to live?" Similarly, Calvin affirmed that he used goal setting to "let [students] know how important it was to have education, whether they were going back to a rural community or into the city,... in order to compete, to put money in your pocket, to have that Trans-Am that you want."

April and Carol each mentioned using "role models and guest speakers" to assist them with student goal setting.

Rewards. The vast majority of participants reported the use of rewards as a strategy. Reflecting on experiences in other schools, Clint thought that the use of rewards in the school was "something I've seen here more than anywhere else." April explained this phenomenon as follows:

> Instant reward, instant gratification. That is what these kids are used to; this is the way they have been raised. You don't think about tomorrow; you only think about today, what you have today. It is instant gratification. It is survival. And I think that's the survival attitude: You are only thinking about what you have today, because you are surviving.

On the other hand, Cara was cautious about what types of rewards should be used. She clarified, "I do believe in giving rewards, but not tangible, not like food and candy. I just won't do that." She argued that by using tangible rewards, "I find [students] don't have the right motivation.... I don't like the concept of 'You owe me,' and I find that a lot in this school."

Nonetheless, Calvin summarized the sentiment of the majority of participants: "Whatever kinds of reward systems that you could develop are absolutely essential."

Flexibility

The majority of the participants emphasized the need for educators to be willing to accommodate and adjust when working with urban Aboriginal students. According to Carol,

> Flexibility ... is the key. There are days when I've walked in and it's cheque day, let's say, and things at home are crazy. And I'll walk in and it'll be like, "Oh, I had this really good lesson [planned]. This isn't working.... We'll do it tomorrow." And it is not a big deal if we do it tomorrow.

Carol felt that this strategy evolved from experience gained from volunteering at the school prior to becoming a teacher. Moreover, through this experience, she realized that "it's not always [the] child's problem when you are having a problem. Sometimes *you're* the problem." Therefore, she concluded, "Sometimes I have to change what *I'm* doing. It's not what they are doing; it's what I am doing."

Calvin stressed the importance of assessing "on a daily basis where the kids are at." Furthermore, both Carl and Adriana confirmed the importance of teacher flexibility in lesson delivery. Carl maintained, "If a teacher strategized to do only one lesson with all the kids, it would never work. You could do one lesson, but you had to adjust to each different [ability level] that you had in the classroom".

Carl, Calvin, and Clint highlighted the importance of adjusting expectations. Clint revealed that "there are things that are happening here that I just would not let happen in other schools.... And it is not me not addressing them; it's me adjusting to them." Carl concurred with Clint's statement. He asserted that

> if you expected kids to produce in class that essay that you received in [another school], you were not going to receive it, so don't expect it. That did not mean you didn't expect work or production or understanding or discussion or any of those things; you expected that. But your expectations had to be realistic: What were the kids going to do and feel successful at and be able to do?

In a similar vein, Calvin responded with the example that

> you don't have to show me with your hands, you don't have to speak verbally, but you have to have it written down, because I'll be back in four or five minutes to check. You don't get out of the learning.

Curriculum and Instruction

Within this broad category, three subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) learning styles, (b) learning resources, and (c) culture.

Learning styles. A recurring theme in the study was what many identified as a unique learning style for Aboriginal students. The participants discussed a variety of strategies. Carl insisted that

> the most successful teachers in [the school] were hands-on teachers.... If you could teach kids a math concept with [manipulatives], the concept stayed. CTS, if you could build things and do fabrications that were hands-on and you taught math or aerodynamics or any of those kinds of things at the same time, that was good.

Calvin felt that an effective strategy he used to present and reinforce concepts was taking students on field trips. He claimed that

> sometimes, just trying to make a course relevant or factual, we took kids on a field trip and tried to work a little math into that. Before we go in swimming, somebody paces off the length and the width, and we try to figure out the pool's capacity.

Cara agreed with Calvin's statement. She reflected that in her experience at the school,

> I've had to learn how to make these [students] learn. What is the best way they are going to learn this? Because they are not going to learn if from reading and doing questions.... So I think you [have to] find other avenues.

Many participants emphasized the weaknesses of using lecture as a teaching strategy. According to Carol, "The lecture method, I find, is not huge with these kids. It has to be more of an interactive kind of thing." Calvin confirmed Carol's view. Reflecting on his experience with urban Aboriginal students, he verified that "very few of the kids I dealt with were auditory learners, so there goes the

lecture method." Furthermore, he contended that "I was conscious of the visual learning style and the tactile learning style, the hands-on learning style, and tried to minimize the lecture method as much as I could."

Carol shared this example from her experience teaching physical education at the school:

> I find that to sit them down and to say to them, "Okay, this is how you play basketball, and these are the rules," forget it! It's not going to work. So the way I do it is, we start playing, and sometimes at the beginning of it I think it'll be pretty hacky. Like basketball, for instance: a lot of rules. But then I'll stop the play, and "That's double dribble; this --" And I'll tell them, and I'll show them. And then they incorporate it as a rule.... That's the way I teach rules, is while we play.

Summarizing the consensus of many participants, Cam bluntly stated, "That old lecture crap ... really doesn't work with our kids at all. Five-minute lectures should be it, and then doing stuff, doing stuff, tactile." With this in mind, referring to her usual teaching routine, Carol explained that

> my class is usually broken up into three types of things: lecture for about five minutes, and then either paired reading or group reading, and then assignment. And a lot of the assignments are group. They love working together.

She attributed the evolution of this strategy to her university coursework and readings in intercultural education. Adriana also credited her intercultural education at university for the evolution of many of her instructional strategies.

Learning resources. Carol reported that as a result of her inability to locate learning resources that were both age and ability appropriate, she had to develop her own. She said:

> I've gone so far as to write my own material. I've taken a Grade 9 text and rewritten it, typed it up myself, rewritten it in shorter sentences, less flowery language, so it's really cut and dried, and I made work sheets to go with them, all on my own.

Culture. Several participants put forth strategies they use to teach or enhance culture with their students. Calvin theorized that "to think that you could ever be successful with Muslim kids or Native kids or Asian kids *without* tying culture into it, you cannot do it." He further contended, "That culture or that connection with who and what they are makes the rest of the learning worthwhile." With this in mind, Andy maintained that a successful schoolwide strategy used

> is that all of the [staff] are [involved] in the traditional practices with the children, and I think that's good, because when a child attends a sweetgrass ceremony in the morning with their teacher, and then they say a prayer to start that day with the teacher, holding hands, that teaches the child something.

Similarly, Calvin felt that having cultural coordinators in the school was an effective cultural strategy, "having somebody relate to their culture, taking time out to make sure that the pipe is honored, the Elders are honored, where they got their traditions from."

Calvin and Carl considered incorporating Aboriginal culture into the core curriculum as an effective strategy. Using junior high social studies to illustrate his point, Calvin asserted:

> The easiest thing to do, of course, is to connect [students] with their roots somewhere, and social studies, historically, you can do it. You can always bring examples as you go through the different grades. Whether you're teaching Brazil or whatever, you are still dealing with Native people, their spirituality, their culture, and everything else as you go through the syllabus in Grade 7, 8, and 9.

Carl agreed with Calvin's statement. In addition, he revealed that a strategy that he used as an administrator was to seek the expertise of the district's Native Education Consultant to "find stories or novels that were fit topics that the kids could understand, related to their life." Further, he insisted, "There are a lot of good [Aboriginal-focused] materials out there if you have somebody looking for them."

Social Skills and Respect

The data suggest that the participants used the strategy of modelling to address perceived deficiencies in both student's social skills and their respect levels. April summed up the sentiment of many through her statement:

> I think most of the staff in this building would say that you are not just a teacher or whatever when you are here; you are also a role model. And I try and share with my students ... as much of myself [as I can]. I share about my education, and I share where I came from, and I think by that role modelling I try to show them that their life doesn't have to be the way it is; they don't have to grow up to be what

> their parents are.... [Furthermore], I'm constantly talking to them about smoking and about drinking, because I abstain from everything.

Carol shared an example of how she used the strategy of modelling. She explained:

> When we change classes, I'm always out in the hallway during class change, because their behavior in the hallway is just horrid. So you have to be out there correcting it constantly:... "Please don't do that," "Please don't hit," "Do you think that is an appropriate way to talk in a hallway?" It's just a constant commentary out there. And then, like I said, being a role model, saying "Please," saying "Thank you." If you want kids to say that to others, then say that to them.

Carol also reported that she has incorporated "social-skills training" into her lessons. She said that for her special-needs classes, "it's half academic, half social skills, because to actually sit in a group and be quiet and listen,... it is always in the lesson. And being polite when someone else is reading."

Racism

Several participants put forth strategies they used to address student racism. Cam commented that at the school level, student assemblies have been conducted that focused on racism. He recounted that these assemblies were directed by Elders.

Calvin described how he used humor and relationship to address student racism. He asserted that

> [students] would share with me an awful lot of racial comments and their perceptions of how *mooniyaws* treated them and the ignorance of the *mooniyaws*. And one of the things was to say that "I

> hear you. I'm a good-looking White Irishman. I've never been there, where you guys are; I've never had that happen to me" and sort of make a joke of it.... And I would use that all the time in the classroom, and I'd ask them to tell me how they feel, and then we would generalize and I would say that "You know what Americans think of Canadians."... And I would say, "Okay, this what we're experiencing right now in the classroom."

April professed that she would share with students, from the perspective of being Aboriginal herself, that "I don't see color.... I am constantly trying to teach our students respect for whoever it is, regardless of the color of their skin."

Anita remarked that she used a "diversity curriculum" as a strategy to address racism.

Strategies Used With Parents

Two themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) relationship building, and (b) accountability.

Relationship Building

In response to such parental challenges as distrust of mainstream education and parental defensiveness, discussed earlier in this study, many participants spoke of the strategy of building relationships with parents. Reflecting on his experiences in conducting parent meetings at the school, Carl explained that "what you had to do was begin the meeting with 'You are doing a fine job. You have a tough situation, and we are just trying to help.'" He further

added that "you might not get what you want the first time or second time [that you meet with parents], but if you are going to work on attitude, you will eventually have parents ... and guardians on side." Carl felt that this strategy evolved as a result of the advice of "several very, very wise Native people."

Anita confirmed Carl's statement. She too believed that a relationship must be fostered between educators and parents of urban Aboriginal students. She stressed that in her experience, educators "can intimidate the shit out of parents, and we do it all the time." She used an example to illustrate her point further. She recalled:

> I remember this parent talking to me. She had a big fight with the principal up at one of the schools I work at, and she was angry and she swore, and of course, when they swear, then she's a problem, and she's the problem now, not the [child]. So once we got her calmed down and she talked to me about how she felt and what she really wanted, I was just blown away. I went back to the principal and I said, "What she really wants is that she knows that Wayne's a challenge for you to deal with, but you know what? She says he's a child of God too, and he has something to offer this world, and if you can't see that, how can you teach him?"

Both Alana and Cara used positive referral letters to parents as a strategy. Alana claimed that "one of the things I do [is] ... write letters to parents to thank them for some of the things they have done." As a result of this practice, she continued that "I had a parent come in today. She's going to school; she has three children at home. She took the time to come in today because I wrote her a letter,

and I appreciate that." Similarly, Cara stated that "I give out referral letters; I write letters every month. If I find a kid is *really* performing well, I'll write a letter and send it home."

The school sponsors several projects aimed at assisting parents. This strategy, according to Alan, has assisted the school to address the challenge of poverty. He recalled that

> [an educator] organized a food bank for the first time at this school at Christmas time, and she got, I think it was thirty-eight poor families that she really stocked up the food, hand delivered [hampers], so there were thirty-eight families in our school then who got a really, really -- I saw them sorting that stuff; there was a mountain of stuff. So that's the sort of practical stuff that speaks volumes. And she also organized a flea market two weeks ago in the school here. So we had the flea market, and you could buy a shirt for a dime, that sort of thing. So there were a lot of families that heard about that; we publicized that. And they came in, and I guess what it is, they leave with good feelings about the place, finally that there's something tangible that they can recognize, rather than just words, because words are just lip service. So there is a tangible thing happening, and what that does is build up [goodwill]. It's an unspoken sort of thing; it builds up goodwill, and these little things add up. But we've never had that before, and in my opinion, that is what we've needed.

When I asked the organizer of this project how this strategy evolved, she replied that "the Elders [taught] me about caring and that you have got to do that with families and kids."

Accountability

Carl, Cam, Clint, and Alana reported that a strategy that they used with parents is accountability. From an

administrator's perspective, Carl insisted that when it came to meetings with parents, "I wasn't going to hold any punches.... It gave me the ability to say to them, '*We* will deal with what your child did.'" In a similar vein, Cam shared a strategy he evolved "out of a pilot project that was done up in St. Paul by Alberta Social Services." He claimed that he learned to conduct home visits with parents "because [otherwise] I could not reach them." He thought that "I've got to make sure there's a parent at home that says [to the child/ren], 'Okay, come on, get up today. Let's get up, okay?'"

Another strategy, which was evolved by Carl to increase parental accountability was as follows:

> When kids and family were ready to give up, in the sense that the kid could not make it [at the school], they had too many family issues, they just had to go for a month or two or whatever, we at the beginning definitely tried to talk them out of it, and it caused more difficulty than anything. So we definitely let them go. And a lot of times we knew they would return, and quite often they did.... And I think that was the issue that was successful, was trying to say that "You own your education. You are in charge of it. We are just here to help you."

From the perspective of a counsellor, Alana asserted that in dealing with parents, "I lay it on the line.... I also talk to parents about 'Where do you want to see your child in five years, two years, whatever?'" She added that

> I am very firm with that -- in a firm way, but a kind way. You don't have to be condescending or rude, but you can be very firm:... "This is the way it's going to be." And then I always use examples and get them to talk about their own lives, and get them to put some sense to what is happening.

Alana thought that this strategy evolved because of her belief in the potential of her Aboriginal culture. She argued that "the cycles can be broken; with some good strategies we'd move on."

Strategies Used With Educators

Two themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) staff cultural awareness, and (b) staff wellness.

Staff Cultural Awareness

In addition to discussion on the cultural awareness of staff, two subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) judgement, and (b) diversity.

The data revealed that an effective strategy was for educators to increase their awareness of Aboriginal culture. Andy, speaking from teachings from Aboriginal Elders, stated that "the Elders that I know, that I've experienced in my journey,... always said,... 'You have to teach the White man who we are.'" With this in mind, Calvin reflected on his many years of experience at the school; more specifically, his many years of exposure to Aboriginal Elders. Regarding his understanding of Aboriginal culture, he concluded that "I've got so far to go. But at least I'm proud of myself that I have come this far." He went on to share his thoughts that

> I worked with a couple of administrators [at the school] who wore a shirt and tie because ... [they

> thought it made them] effective. But I always thought that as soon as I put on a shirt and tie, I automatically distanced myself, so I always felt comfortable in jeans.

Many participants pointed out that a strategy they used to gain cultural awareness was, as Calvin illustrated, to "immerse myself as much as I could in [Aboriginal] culture." Carl confirmed Calvin's statement. He stressed that "definitely as a group, one of the most important things was to participate in all the different kinds of ceremonies that Native [cultures] entail." This was facilitated in part, according to Carl, by including "the Native counsellors in our staff meetings, so they would give us the Native perspective, and we had lots and lots of guest speakers."

In addition, both Cam and Andy emphasized that the district provided many workshops, inservices, and programs that addressed Aboriginal pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual issues. However, more participants attributed their cultural awareness simply to being at the school, watching, and listening. In fact, Cara felt that cultural workshops were not overly effective. She asserted, "I went to one workshop; that didn't help." Instead, she agreed with many who, as Clint summarized, gained the most insight from "coming here, and I'll say as a rookie, my eyes are wide open, my ears are wide open; I have to see what actually is happening here."

Carl confirmed Clint's statement. Nevertheless, he also credited his interaction with Aboriginal people who took the

time to coach and enlighten him. In a similar vein, Anita claimed that she evolved a further understanding "from [Aboriginal] people who are very connected to the community, ... and very connected to very spiritual things."

Adriana mentioned that her intercultural education specialization at university was paramount in her evolution of cultural awareness. Furthermore, many participants indicated that they were, at the time of this research, either currently enrolled or in the process of enrolling in graduate programs in Aboriginal or intercultural studies.

Judgement. April, Alan, and Andy identified judgement and the "missionary" attitude of educators as a strategy that definitely did not work with urban Aboriginal students. April found that

> different teachers come here from other schools in the district. Having heard about [the school] and having heard what it is about, they wanted to come and work here because they felt that they had something to offer that we were not already doing, and they came in with that missionary kind of attitude, that "I know what's right. I know what's going to work at [the school]. I am going to fix all your problems, and you guys are doing it all wrong." These people did not last very long.

Alan concurred with April. He believed that

> whenever you are implying judgement, you are in hot water here, because you are putting yourself in a position that's above them, whereas you should be at eye level. You can't be below them; you can't be above them.

Andy agreed with both April and Alan, claiming that educators are "not fixers, [but instead] facilitators of

change." However, he warned educators not to err in the opposite direction either. He felt that educators of urban Aboriginal students must have

> a totally open mind, an open mind and an open heart. Do not limit yourself to just working, do not limit yourself to not feeling, because if you are going into that school without a heart and without an open mind, the community is going to say, "Get rid of that person."

With this in mind, when I asked Clint to reflect on the time that he has been at the school and how he had changed, he replied that he felt he has become

> more understanding, more aware ... [of] the plight of Aboriginals; in some cases ... I think I was misled. When I saw things in the paper about Natives, it seemed to me that it was just the money they were getting more than [non-Aboriginal people] and I think that I have been misled; I think it was a misconception on my part. You hear stories of the people who turn whatever age and they get a lump sum of money.... But the number of Aboriginals that are living in poverty is incredible. So my eyes have been opened.

Diversity. Although many participants held that Aboriginal cultural awareness was an effective strategy, several participants emphasized the importance of educators being aware that not all cultural teachings apply to all Aboriginal peoples. Reflecting on my research intentions, Anita cautioned me not to "cubbyhole" all urban Aboriginal students. She endorsed my research intentions: "As long as you don't try to look for sameness and you don't look for 'Here's the rule about Indians,' because we are as diverse as the non-Native population."

Andy confirmed Anita's statement. In reference to the various Aboriginal groups that comprise the school's student population, he pointed out that

> whenever I go to [the school] and present to the kids there, I have to bear in mind that some of them may be of Inuit descent, some of them may be of Plains Cree descent, Woodland Cree descent, Métis, or Salish from the West.

Therefore, a strategy he suggested was to do "a little bit of research,... and not to have a preconceived thought of the community."

Staff Wellness

Within this broad category, four subthemes that appear to be related to staff wellness emerged. They were (a) selective dissociation, (b) establishing limits, (c) interdependence, and (d) physical activity.

Selective dissociation. Several participants noted that a strategy that they had evolved during their time at the school was, as Carl asserted, "to let it go,... and I made sure that if I wasn't at school in the evenings, I wasn't at school. In other words, I wasn't there in my mind." He further illustrated the "technique" he used for letting go. He recalled that "I would walk out the door, and as I shut the door, I took a huge cleansing breath."

Both Cara and April commented that a strategy that they had evolved during their time at the school was, as Cara commented, to "not sweat the small stuff." According to

April, "I think if you are going to last here and if you are going to be effective here, you have to let some of those things go, some of those things that would bother a teacher in another school." However, she was quick to clarify that "I would not say that you are lessening your standards; I think you are just accepting that these are [tough] kids."

Cam reported that a strategy he evolved for dissociating himself was to "compartmentalize everything, put things away in your brain." He argued that "you have to [compartmentalize] to survive, because in our business, in the business of the trauma of [the school], you would not survive if you kept dwelling and thinking about that stuff."

Establishing limits. Although this would appear to contradict the strategy described earlier as *above and beyond the call*, both Carl and Cara made it clear that a strategy that they had evolved was to make conscious decisions about the types and quantity of after-school commitments in which they were willing to take part. As an administrator, Carl claimed, "You could be at some meeting with some group every single night." In light of this, he maintained that he was prepared "to give up one night a week; that was the most" to devote to after-school requests.

Cara focused her thoughts within the school. She reflected on her struggle in the past with trying to accommodate all students because of high absenteeism and low motivation. She commented that after a considerable period

of time teaching at the school, she had learned that "you have to move on, and you have to keep going. Give the kids what they have missed; they can work on it at their own pace."

Interdependence. Adriana, Cam, and Carl considered teamwork and sharing among staff to be an effective strategy. Because of the high demand on educators' time at the school, Adriana felt that "I am much more open to people in my classroom than I've ever been." Furthermore, Cam theorized that

> a lot of the staff from [the school],... who have left us have kept in touch, because it is like being in the trench with somebody because it is so stressful, and you connect with that person. You stay with that person for years.

With this in mind, Carl described an impromptu "discussion group" that had evolved among many staff during his first year as an administrator at the school. To his recollection, this practice began as he worked with "one or two [educators] who had some difficulties with confrontation and getting emotionally involved.... I would sit with them and work with them." As time went on, he recalled that this practice became more formalized: "I had a couple of couches in my office, and at the end of [almost every] day we debriefed." This strategy was so effective, revealed Carl, that "we actually formalized it the second year I was there."

Physical activity. Several participants mentioned that physical activity is a strategy that they used to maintain wellness. Carol stated that "every night I go home and have a run." Summing up the sentiment of many, she believed that this strategy "really helps stress relief." Other participants reported additional means of physical activity; golf, for instance. However the *purpose* of the activity was universal among them.

Strategies Used With Administrators

Two themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were (a) school program, and (b) resources.

School Program

In addition to discussion on school program, six subthemes that appear to be related emerged. They were (a) family feelings, (b) cultural programs, (c) increasing district respect, (d) counselling and intervention programs, (e) attendance, and (f) feeding.

Carl and Calvin each highlighted administrative strategies that they implemented during their tenure at the school. Carl recalled one strategy that was mutually beneficial to both students and staff and that had evolved as a result of a suggestion put forth by several teaching staff. He described that they extended four of the school days per week and dismissed students at noon every Thursday. Further, Thursday afternoons were reserved for weekly staff

meetings. According to Carl, this early dismissal practice "made a huge difference in the discipline cycle."

Moreover, Carl pointed out an unintended, yet welcome benefit that arose from the weekly early dismissal practice. He said, "That's also when we realized that half-days were very successful, so that's one of the things we did for sure with a lot of kids, is put them on half-day school, and they survived. And it made a difference."

Referring to the timetabling practice at the school, Carl stated that "traditional models did not, definitely did not work.... If you timetabled so the kids [received] all core subjects in the morning, you were in trouble." With this in mind, he explained that the school timetable consisted of small classes of "fifteen kids ... at the very, very most," with core and complementary courses interspaced.

In addition, the timetable included daily physical education classes. However, according to several participants, this strategy was limited because of, as Austin pointed out, a lack of "a proper playground." Adriana concurred with Austin's statement. She emphasized that as a result of a lack of playground facilities, all physical education activities had to be conducted indoors.

Calvin shared that a strategy he evolved at the school was to remove chronic behavior-problem children from the school. He recollected one particularly profound situation that resulted in his evolving this strategy:

> I had to finally go to the administrator and say, "This guy is absolutely undermining my classroom. I can't get anything done. And what happens if this guy is moved out of the school?" And the basic answer was, "He goes on the street," and I really had a difficult time with that, that I'm going to make a decision that is going to put a kid on the street. But eventually I had to. I came to the conclusion that I've reinforced over the years that we can't save them all. I immediately removed the student, or had him removed from the school, period. And I hate to say this, but it turned things around because of the impact it had on the rest of the kids.

As a result of this experience, Calvin concluded that

> if a kid is an aggressive person, has shown aggressiveness all their life, if this person comes to school seven days a year, if this person is conduct disordered or oppositionally defiant and gives all of our teachers a hard time, I'm sorry; let them go somewhere else.

Carol agreed with Calvin. She also felt that "I've kept kids in my room too long trying to work something out, when I should have removed them."

However, Andy and Austin took exception to the practice of removing students from the school. Andy asserted that "a strategy that just does not work ... [is] booting kids out and saying, 'They're not going to be my problem any more.'" He further questioned, "What is the sense in that?... If I don't do my darnedest as an educator to help this kid,... what a mistake, to me. Work with that child."

Family feelings. The data indicate that many participants thought that the school fostered a family atmosphere. They added that this phenomenon applied to both students and staff. Describing the atmosphere of the school,

Cam explained, "It's the family thing. It's the way the kids feel towards these teachers and support staff; it's what is keeping these kids here.... This is a family. And a family that is safe."

Clint confirmed Cam's statement. He thought that the school was "kind of [a] family because you feel you have to take more responsibility for the kid, not just for their education, but for their well-being, their travel." For example, he revealed that

> we were in court, [another educator] and myself, over the Christmas break for a student.... He was very appreciative and made a point of letting me know and shook my hand when he saw me back at school.... I think that's quite unique to this school.

Characterizing the relationship among the staff within the school, Ann noted, "It's almost like a family setting.... My colleagues, I can go to any one of them and bitch all I want. They are there to listen; they have strategies for me to use."

Cultural program. Many participants identified the cultural program offered at the school as a strategy. Encapsulating the program, April stated that "we have Friday afternoons set aside for our students to do cultural activities, and they get to pick which activities they are going to be in." She detailed the types of cultural activities as follows:

> Our kids ... do archery or go to the museum. [We] bring in different guests, we have had different

> Elders in. And we had an actor come in and do a thing with masks, Iroquois masks. And some of our students are doing art, Native art.

Although many participants spoke highly of the merits of this strategy, Andy questioned it. He claimed that the school must be cautious in its approach to providing cultural programming. He advised that, because of the various cultural backgrounds and home lives of the students, they be given the choice to participate or not. He said,

> As an educator, I think that if I'm going to go in and say, "We're going to teach you your culture," without giving the child the option -- and again, there are a lot of kids who ... have *never* known their culture -- what a mistake!

Increasing district respect. Both April and Austin emphasized the school's student dance troupe as a strategy for increasing the school's profile and respect throughout the district. Austin also highlighted the positive effects of the dance troupe on the students.

April admitted that one of her primary goals in starting the dance troupe was to increase the profile of both the school and Aboriginal culture. She recalled,

> One of my goals was to go out to other schools and promote our culture, promote who we are, show other schools and other educators and other students that [the school] isn't such a bad place and that good things do happen here.

Counselling and intervention programs. Analysis of the interview transcripts indicates that several effective counselling programs are offered at the school. Alana

explained that these programs address issues such as student alcohol use, sexuality, relationships, and sexually transmitted diseases. She claimed that these programs evolved from her university training, social-work practice, and "being a parent."

In addition, Alan described an anger-management program offered at the school. This program "went for about a month. A couple of times a week [students] met for an hour, and they went through identifying anger issues and things like that." Although Alan felt that this program was effective, he conceded that "a life-skills coach is actually what we need here, to very honest. That would be even better."

Cara maintained that many educators took advantage of subjects such as health and religion to "sit with a group of [students] and talk ... and discuss ... many kinds of topics."

With all of this in mind, Cam acknowledged that at the school, "there's a lot of counselling that goes on." However, "not enough. We could have three or four counsellors at [the school] that would be working full time."

Attendance. Several strategies addressing student attendance were identified by the participants. Many educators conceded that their strategy was simply to refer attendance concerns to the school administrators.

Cara noted that a strategy she used with special-needs students was to "put them on more or less individualized programs, because their attendance seems to be the worst, or the most sporadic."

April and Cara identified monthly attendance awards as an effective strategy. According to April, each month students are "recognized in front of the whole school for their attendance. And their names are displayed in the hallway."

Clint mentioned that a strategy used to address students without bus passes was the distribution of bus tickets. However, he admitted that at a dollar each, and with the high demand, "we don't always have them." In response, Cara recommended that more effort be afforded to providing subsidization. Linking this situation to student attendance concerns, she felt that "if we could somehow fundraise or find some kind of program to fund bus tickets, or ... subsidize bus passes, I think we would have a lot more kids coming."

Feeding. Both Carl and Cam recognized the schoolwide breakfast and lunch program as an effective strategy to address such challenges as students' preparedness for school, their home lives, and poverty. Carl was blunt in defending this program. He asserted that, prior to implementing this program, "a lot of kids came to school without the preparedness of being full and satisfied and

ready to work, so feeding the kids was absolutely essential." Cam explained that this program evolved as a result of his approaching the then-director of the provincial Department of Aboriginal Affairs and securing the necessary funding. Furthermore, he emphasized that this strategy had resulted in the formation of "many lunch programs all around the city."

Resources

Responding to the challenge of scarce financial resources at the school, April and Adriana shared strategies that have assisted them. April spoke of a fundraising strategy planned for May of 1998. Capitalizing on the cultural richness of the school, she detailed that

> we talked about having a powwow, [but] the fact is that we don't have the money to do it, so we wanted to turn it around and do something that would raise money, so we are going to be doing a conference. We are inviting other schools, especially Aboriginal students, to come, and they will move through different modules. We will have a dance and drumming module and a Cree module with an Elder where they will probably be making bannock.... And we are going to be charging each student five dollars to come through, and it will be sort of like an interactive museum.

She also noted that financial resources were raised through a school-operated casino. These funds, she said, were used "to buy computers and books: basic things that you would think every school needs." However, this strategy is limited in that, because of provincial regulations, the school is entitled to host a casino only once every two years.

Illustrating the severity of the financial situation at the school, Adriana spoke of having to compete with other groups in the school in order to raise funds for her class: "I used to sell potato chips, and then Student Council started a mini market down the hall and cut my share out." As a result, she claimed that "I end up spending my own [money], because I need to buy art stuff, because [students] need to know how to do fabric sewing, and there's nothing around." Nevertheless, she stressed that "I don't mind spending [my own money], because there is no money. We have been told not to spend anything."

Summary

This chapter presented findings that addressed the second and third research questions. These questions were:

What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified, and
How did these strategies evolve?

Participant responses to each of the two research questions were combined throughout the chapter. Therefore, the strategy and, where applicable, the evolution of that strategy are presented together.

The findings were presented in four sections. As with Chapter IV, each of these sections harmonizes with the conceptual framework for this research, Figure 2.1. With this in mind, identification of strategies, as well as their

evolution, where applicable, was organized into these four categories: (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators.

The participants identified six themes related to strategies used with students. They were reported as (a) building relationships, (b) establishing and maintaining high expectations, (c) being flexible, (d) adapting both curriculum and instruction, (e) addressing deficiencies in both social skills and respect, and (f) proactively preventing student racism. Within several of these themes, subthemes emerged and were presented.

Regarding the identification and evolution of educational strategies exercised with parents of urban Aboriginal students, two themes emerged. These themes were relationship building between parents and educators, and holding parents accountable for education issues pertaining to their children.

Two themes relating the identification and evolution of educator strategies were identified by the participants. They were (a) increasing staff cultural awareness, and (b) proactively maintaining staff wellness. Within these themes, a total of six subthemes emerged and were presented.

Examining the identification and evolution of educational strategies associated with administrators, analysis of the interview transcripts yielded two main themes. They were presented as (a) adjustments to the school

program, and (b) addressing deficiencies in resources. As well, within the first theme, six subthemes emerged and were put forth.

The following chapter discusses the findings related to the second and third research questions, presented in this chapter. The findings were examined in relation to the field work, the literature, and my observations.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS -- QUESTIONS 2 & 3

The intention of this chapter is to discuss and integrate the findings of Chapter VI with those of the field work, the existing literature, and my observations. I discuss the findings in the sequence in which they were presented in the previous chapter.

Strategies Used With Students

Relationships

The participants discussed relationships, as well as six subthemes: (a) trust, (b) patience, (c) democratic interaction, (d) friendships, (e) above and beyond the call, and (f) humor. These strategies were put forth by the participants in response to several identified challenges encountered with students, especially self-esteem, trust, and testing.

Consistent with the assertions of Kleinfeld (1972, 1975), Fisher and Sallens (1974; as cited in Whyte, 1986), and Wilson (1994), the overwhelming majority of participants believed, as Cam said, that "relationships are everything. The kids won't work for you if they don't like you." Cam's statement agreed with that of Fisher and Sellens, who verified that "teachers who succeeded in eliciting a high level of ... participation from Native students tended to

respond to them with an intense personal warmth rather than a professional distance" (p. 4).

On the other hand, the majority of participants insisted that a strategy that proved to be ineffective was confrontation. This aligns with Van Ness (1982) and Whyte (1986) who claimed that educators often use methods of authority -- confrontation, for example -- which are discontinuous with Aboriginal values. Furthermore, confrontation was characterized by Pepper and Henry (1986) as discontinuous with the parenting customs of Aboriginal parents.

Trust. The importance of educators earning the trust of urban Aboriginal students was identified as a strategy. This finding was not discussed in the literature but was deemed significant by several participants. Calvin summarized the sentiment of many by explaining that "I was always conscious that I was one person that was going to be a safe adult in their eyes at all times."

This strategy is especially important for educators of urban Aboriginal students in light of the literature (e.g., Atleo, 1991; Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Ogbu, 1993), which accentuated a strong parental distrust of mainstream education. This distrust has, invariably, transferred from parents to their children.

Patience. The data showed that many participants felt that patience was an effective strategy in establishing relationships with urban Aboriginal students. This was reinforced by Garrett and Garrett (1994) and Prater, Rezzonico, Pyron, Chischille, Arthur, and Yellowhair (1995). Garrett and Garrett emphasized that patience is a cultural trait of Aboriginal people, and therefore educators of Aboriginal children must practice patience in order to be effective (p. 141).

With this in mind, several educators advised that yelling at or reacting to students was counterproductive. According to April, "With our people you have to use a very gentle approach." This was confirmed by Van Ness (1982) and Whyte (1986).

Democratic interaction. Many participants described the use of democratic interactions with students as a strategy. The literature (e.g., Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Leavitt, 1995; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Stairs, 1995; Whyte, 1986) concurred with this finding. Estrin and Nelson-Barber claimed that educators of Aboriginal children must refrain from wielding "any overt social control, choosing instead to share control with their students" (p. 3). In a similar vein, Leavitt maintained that effective educators of Aboriginal children "demonstrated ... and planned student-instructor collaboration" (p. 124).

Both Alana and Alan stated that an unsuccessful strategy that many educators attempted was, as Alan portrayed, "the traditional '50s approach to education where 'I am the supreme authority, the teacher, and you will respect me.'" This was reinforced by Pepper and Henry (1986), who revealed that, at home, Aboriginal children "are trained to be self-directed and self-reliant, by having the freedom to make many of their own choices and decisions" (p. 55). Similarly, Whyte (1986) asserted that for Aboriginal peoples, "the social situations outside the home are never directed or controlled by a single individual who acts in supreme authority" (p. 6).

Friendships. The findings indicated that the establishment of friendships between students and educators was an effective strategy. Fisher and Sellens (1974; as cited in Whyte, 1986), affirmed that

> teachers who succeeded in eliciting a high level of ... participation from Native students tended to respond to them with an intense personal warmth rather than a professional distance. Teachers communicated such feelings by developing friendships with students outside the classroom. (pp. 4-5)

This appears to be somewhat controversial and even incongruent with the commonly held doctrine that suggests that educators establish a professional distance between themselves and students.

Above and beyond the call. The data clearly indicated that educators believed in the importance of devoting extra

time and effort to their positions. Although no specific literature was found to corroborate this finding, it was deemed to be significant by the vast majority of the participants.

Specific strategies were described by various educators, ranging from "nonteaching-time" activities such as eating lunch with the students to specific counselling programs and techniques that were detailed by Andy and Alana. Although effective, these strategies are not unique to urban Aboriginal education.

Humor. The findings identified educators' use of humor with urban Aboriginal students as an effective strategy. Calvin summed up the sentiment of many through his contention that humor is "absolutely vital." This was corroborated by the literature (e.g., Garrett & Garrett, 1994; Herring & Meggert, 1994; Prater, Rezzonico, Pyron, Chischille, Arthur, & Yellowhair, 1995).

Calvin offered an example of how humor was used by educators to diffuse potentially difficult incidents. According to Herring and Meggert (1994), "Whether it is in reference to paradox, the ironic, the unanticipated, or the situation, Native ... Indians use humor's ability to erase, cleanse, or change what was embarrassing, oppressive, sorrowful, or painful" (pp. 67-68).

Both Calvin and Carol reported the use of humor in building relationships with their students. This was

reinforced by Garrett and Garrett (1994), who said that, for Aboriginal people, "humor serves the purpose of reaffirming and enhancing the sense of connectedness experienced in being part of the group" (p. 142).

High Expectations

Analysis of the interview transcripts identified high expectations of Aboriginal students by educators as an effective strategy. The participants also discussed three related subthemes: (a) structure, (b) goals, and (c) rewards.

Consistent with the assertions of Kleinfeld (1972, 1975), the majority of participants believed that by having high expectations, educators communicated to their students that they cared for and believed in them. Some maintained that several educators who had previously served the school were less than successful with the students because of a lack of expectations. Agreeing with the assertions of Wilson (1991), this may, as Cara suggested, have been indicative of "racism" and/or "laziness" on the part of the educators.

Structure. This subtheme appears new in light of a lack of literature specific to structure and Aboriginal education. Nevertheless, many participants deemed it to be significant.

At first glance, it would appear that this theme runs contrary to the theories of Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995),

Pepper and Henry (1986), and Whyte (1986), who all advocated, as Whyte stated, "an open classroom environment as opposed to a more structured traditional classroom setting" (p. 16). However, upon further reflection it becomes apparent that this is not the case. The cited literature instead described classroom environments that were indeed structured, but in addition were aligned with the characteristics unique to Aboriginal students as opposed to "traditional" or mainstream students. For example, Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995) asserted that in Aboriginal culture, "it is the norm to speak to the group as a whole rather than addressing a comment or posing a question to an individual" (p. 2). Therefore, "rather than asking individual students to answer questions, teachers allowed the whole group to call out answers" (p. 3).

Goals. Goal setting was a strategy many participants used with their students. This strategy was put forth to address the perceived challenge of students' absence of goals. The merits of goal setting was supported by Alberta Education (1987b), which emphasized that

> the aim of Native education is to develop the knowledge, the skills, and the positive attitudes of Native students so that they will be self-confident, capable, and committed to setting goals, to making informed choices, and acting in ways that will improve their own lives, and the life of both Native and non-Native communities throughout Alberta. (p. 3)

This policy statement appears sound. However, in light of the participants' comments suggesting that an absence of goals consistent with mainstream society runs deep within the Aboriginal culture, involving not only students but their parents as well, student goal setting alone would seem to be insufficient in addressing this issue.

Rewards. This finding appears new in light of a lack of literature specific to the effects of rewards with Aboriginal students. This is surprising in that the vast majority of participants identified the use of rewards as an effective educational strategy. Furthermore, rewards appeared to be a major component of other educational strategies, such as counselling, intervention programs, and attendance.

Flexibility

The findings indicated that the majority of participants felt that educators must be flexible when serving the educational needs of urban Aboriginal students, although they reported mixed perceptions of what flexibility meant. Carol and Calvin discussed flexibility in terms of daily assessments of "where the kids are at," whereas, Calvin, Carl, and Adriana discussed flexibility in terms of lesson delivery strategies. This paralleled McCaig's (1993) understanding that if educators were to accommodate the "various learning styles of their students, perhaps some of

the difficulties would be alleviated and students could achieve greater success in learning" (p. 17).

Still another form of flexibility was identified by Carl, Calvin, and Clint, who suggested that educators must be flexible in their expectations of urban Aboriginal students. This could be perceived as a lowering of their standards. Clint said, "If you expected kids to produce in class that essay that you received in [another school], you were not going to receive it, so don't expect it." This appears to contradict the research of Kleinfeld (1972, 1975), who contended that high expectations are essential for teachers of Aboriginal students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction was discussed in relation to three subthemes which emerged. They were (a) learning styles, (b) learning resources, and (c) culture.

Learning styles. Consistent with the literature (e.g., Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Irvine & York, 1995; More, 1993; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Whyte, 1986), many participants shared educational strategies to address what they believed to be a unique learning style exhibited by Aboriginal students.

According to Pepper and Henry (1986),

> There is a growing body of research to suggest that the distinctively different child-rearing practices -- one stressing observational learning and another emphasizing learning through verbalization -- has

> fostered the development of very different styles of learning among Indian and European-American children. (p. 57)

In a similar vein, Whyte (1986) found evidence for an Aboriginal learning style "drawn from several ethnographic sources and from a host of intelligence tests which have led researchers to conclude the cognitive style of Indian peoples is perceptual, figural, spacial, and visual" (p. 12).

Several participants emphasized the ineffectiveness of using lecture as a program-delivery strategy. This was reinforced by Irvine and York (1995) and Pepper and Henry (1986). Irvine and York claimed that Aboriginal children "prefer visual, spatial, and perceptual information rather than verbal" (p. 490).

Carol's example of teaching the rules of basketball through the process of practising aligned with the ideas of Estrin and Nelson-Barber (1995), who stated that effective teachers of Aboriginal children "tended to structure classrooms so children learned from each other as well as from the teacher" (p. 3).

Carol and Adriana credited their university coursework and readings in intercultural education with their evolving strategies to address learning styles. No one cited either school- or district-based inservices as a source of enlightenment. This is unfortunate in light of the fact that not all educators had received intercultural exposure during

their teacher-education program. McCaig (1993, p. 17) maintained that, for the most part, Canadian educators align their teaching styles along the basis of an analytic and auditory approach, which runs contrary to what Pepper and Henry (1986, p. 58) termed as Aboriginal students' visual and spatial learning preferences.

Learning resources. Because of a perceived absence of appropriate resources, attributed to both nonexistence and a lack of money to purchase the small amount available, Carol reported that a strategy that she had evolved was to develop her own. Whereas Carol's strategy was in response to the challenge of locating high interest, ability, and age appropriate resources, the literature, (e.g., Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Kleinfeld, Williamson-McDiarmid, Grubis, & Parrett, 1983; Whyte, 1986) addressed learning-resource concerns from the perspective of cultural content.

Culture. The participants approached discussion on Aboriginal culture in two ways. First, Andy shared the schoolwide strategy that involved all staff in daily Aboriginal cultural and spiritual practices with the students, orchestrated by cultural coordinators. It would appear that this corroborated Irvine and York's (1995) assertion that effective educators of Aboriginal children "must contextualize the teaching act, giving attention to their students' cultural norms, behaviors, and experiences"

(p. 494).

Second, strategies used to incorporate Aboriginal culture into lessons were described. This was supported by Heit (1993, p. 6), who maintained that increases in student motivation and learning occur when Aboriginal students see their culture and traditions reflected and valued in their school. Nevertheless, Leavitt (1995) cautioned that in order to be effective, educators "must choose whether programs will simply include Native culture as content, or whether they will be based on Native culture through the adaptation of traditional educational practices" (p. 134).

Social Skills and Respect

As stated earlier in this study, many participants identified student social skills and disrespect as challenges encountered. The findings reveal that educators' modelling was an effective strategy that they had evolved. Powless and Elliott (1993) reported that Aboriginal children acquire mainstream social skills through their "social interactions with teachers, classmates, and other persons" (p. 294). Although Powless and Elliott's assertions referred specifically to Aboriginal children, it seems that this finding was not unique to Aboriginal education.

Another strategy described by Carol was to incorporate mainstream "social-skills training" directly into lessons. This strategy, facilitated in part by the participants' development of their own learning resources, along with

effective modelling during lesson delivery, appears to be an effective method of enhancing student social skills.

Racism

Interestingly, student racism was not perceived to be a significant challenge by the participants. In fact, they were much more eager to discuss challenges of racist attitudes and behaviors exhibited by educators. Nevertheless, several participants offered strategies that they had evolved to combat student racist behaviors. The strategies described ranged from Elder-directed student assemblies denouncing racism to student-counselling programs incorporating curriculum and resources that addressed racism.

Strategies Used With Parents

Relationship Building

Carr and Klassen (1997) suggested that low parental involvement of minority groups leads to "low educational outcomes or underperformance" (p. 68). Many participants believed that involvement, support, and trust resulted from building relationships between parents and the school.

Another strategy that the participants felt was extremely effective was the evolution of school-sponsored parental-assistance projects such as a food bank and flea markets. This finding appears to align with Eberhard's

(1989) belief that "schools need to reach out to ... Indian parents. It is a matter of relationship" (p. 39).

Accountability

In response to the aforementioned challenge of parenting skills, consistent with the assertions of Eberhard (1989), the Education Commission of the States (1996), Gundersen (1986), and Swisher, Hoisch, and Pavel (1991), the strategy of holding parents accountable was stressed by Carl, Cam, Clint, and Alana. Moreover, the four agreed not only that this strategy was effective, but also that without holding parents accountable, they would be negligent as educators.

All four participants were careful to emphasize that although they held a tough position with parents, by no means were they judging them. Alana summed up the sentiment of the others as follows: "You don't have to be condescending or rude, but you can be very firm." This was reinforced by Gundersen (1986), who related an accountability strategy used with Aboriginal parents to improve student attendance:

> If a student was absent, contact with the home was made to determine if the absence was a truancy and to keep the parents/guardians informed of their student's attendance. After three consecutive absences, a home visit was made by either the guidance counselor, truant officer, social worker, or teacher. If the absence was unexcused, and the student still did not return to school, the family was referred for processing through the court system. (p. 19)

Strategies Used With Educators

Staff Cultural Awareness

The participants identified the theme of staff cultural awareness, as well as the subthemes of (a) judgement and (b) diversity. The data revealed that many participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, felt that an effective strategy for educators was to increase their awareness of Aboriginal culture. This was reinforced by Alberta Education (1987a) and Johnson and Ramirez (1990). To serve the educational needs of culturally diverse children effectively, Johnson and Ramirez claimed that educators need to "understand and consider the special circumstances of distinct cultural groups" (p. vii).

Some participants discussed immersing themselves in Aboriginal culture to gain insight. Others believed that participation in workshops, inservices, and programs that emphasized Aboriginal issues was an effective method of enlightenment. This was in agreement with the position of Alberta Education (1987a), which maintained that educators of Aboriginal students should "receive pre-service and/or inservice relative to Native cultures" (p. 19).

Judgement. The participants discussed a strategy that proved to be ineffective with urban Aboriginal students: judging students. In agreement with the assertions of Atleo (1991), Corson (1991), and Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas

(1990), several Aboriginal educators condemned what they perceived as a "missionary" or judgemental attitude. According to Atleo, these viewpoints lead to the belief held by many mainstream educators that "in order for the Indians to survive, they would have to be assimilated into the [mainstream] social order" (p. 2).

Diversity. The literature (e.g., Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Irvine & York, 1995; Johnson & Ramirez, 1990; Wilgosh & Mulcahy, 1993) concurred with the findings that caution against assuming cultural homogeneity among Aboriginal students. Anita and Andy both confirmed that to "cubbyhole" all urban Aboriginal students and to assume "sameness" among them are inappropriate. This was supported by Johnson and Ramirez, who insisted that educators "recognize that although Native cultures share many common values and practices, there are also distinct differences across groups" (p. 1). They further emphasized that "culture exists on a continuum, with individuals demonstrating traits which range from those traditionally attributed to the ethnic group to those that are descriptive of a minority individual who has been totally assimilated into the majority culture" (p. 12).

Staff Wellness

Analysis of the interview transcripts clearly identified strategies used by educators to maintain personal

wellness. The participants discussed this theme through four related subthemes: (a) selective dissociation, (b) establishing limits, (c) interdependence, and (d) physical activity.

Selective dissociation. The participants stressed the importance of, as Cara stressed, "not sweating the small stuff." This finding appears new in light of a lack of literature. However, many participants strongly believed it to be an effective strategy.

Many educators were eager not only to share their strategies, but also to detail the specific ways they have evolved. For the most part, the participants seemed to express more candor and intensity with respect to this topic than to most others examined during our interviews.

Establishing limits. Two participants, both Caucasian, detailed that a strategy that they had evolved to maintain personal wellness was to limit the amount of after-school time they devoted to the Aboriginal community. This finding was not addressed in the literature but was deemed significant by the participants. It was by no means an indication that these educators had lowered their standards or had lost their devotion to their positions. To the contrary, both participants thought that by drawing the line on noneducational commitments, their effectiveness and commitment were enhanced.

Interdependence. The strategies reported by the participants concurred with Covey's (1989) conception of interdependence. Discussion touched on personal and group activities. One participant recounted her personal journey over the time she had served the school, recounting her growth from being a loner to becoming interdependent. Covey described precisely this pattern, claiming that effective people experience three stages in their personal evolution: from dependence to independence to interdependence.

Physical activity. Physical activity was emphasized by several participants as an effective strategy to enhance staff wellness. Although not unique to urban Aboriginal education, the participants felt that it was significant. More significant, however, was that physical activity was advocated by so many of the participants, perhaps in response to their realization of the high-stress component of the work environment and, therefore, their recognition of the need to address it. This was reinforced by Covey (1989), who confirmed that "to exercise our bodies on a regular basis is a way that will preserve and enhance our capacity to work and adapt" (p. 291).

Strategies Used With Administrators

School Program

The participants identified this theme, as well as the subthemes of (a) family feelings, (b) cultural program,

(c) increasing district respect, (d) counselling and intervention strategies, (e) attendance, and (f) feeding.

Because the discussion was specific to the case school, no literature was found relating to the program of the school. Participant responses were mixed. Some discussed the school program from the standpoint of administrative adjustments to the timetable. Others focused on adaptations to policies related to student behavior.

There was disagreement among educators with respect to the procedure of removing behaviorally difficult students from the school. Only one educator, Andy, strongly expressed discomfort with removing students who, as Calvin described, "undermine" the school. Of the participants who favored removing disruptive students, two had served in administrative capacities, and all were Caucasian. The educator who spoke against this practice was Aboriginal.

Family feelings. Contrary to the earlier assertions of Austin and Adriana, who shared concerns regarding the cohesiveness of the staff, many more participants thought that there were strong "family feelings" among the staff. As well, many extended this phenomenon to encompass the bond among students and staff.

Cultural program. Concurring with Alberta Education (1987a, 1987b), Gundersen (1986), and Heit (1993), many participants identified the weekly cultural program as an

effective strategy. This, along with Cree language classes, comprised approximately 20% of students' instructional time. According to Heit (1993), "When First Nations students see *themselves* -- their histories and traditions -- reflected and valued in the schools they attend and in the curriculum they are taught, they may be more motivated to learn and to enjoy school" (p. 6).

Nevertheless, Andy was reluctant to endorse this program. He stressed that it is inappropriate to force a cultural program upon the students because of circumstances associated with their home lives or the diversity and/or absence of culture.

Increasing district respect. April and Austin strongly felt that the student Aboriginal-dance troupe was an effective strategy to combat the negative image associated with both the school and Aboriginal students that many perceived flourished throughout the district.

Discomfort with the district's respect for and support of the school was a theme that was not limited to the sentiments of April and Austin. In fact, perceptions of district disrespect seemed to resonate throughout the responses of the majority of the participants, which are presented and discussed throughout this study.

Counselling and intervention programs. Although many participants indicated that, ideally, more counselling

personnel were required to meet the needs of the students fully, the findings indicate that there were several effective counselling and intervention programs offered through the school. Consistent with the assertions of Garrett and Garrett (1994) and Gundersen (1986), these programs were tailored to address counselling issues from an Aboriginal perspective.

Furthermore, these programs were facilitated by Aboriginal educators who demonstrated remarkable understanding of and insight into the needs of urban Aboriginal students. This was reinforced by Garrett and Garrett (1994), who said, "The culturally sensitive counselor or helping professional will integrate aspects of Native ... cultural heritage within a traditional theoretical orientation" (p. 139).

Moreover, these professionals were successful in modelling to other educators effective and culturally congruent counselling and guidance strategies, which they then incorporated in their classrooms.

Attendance. Strategies addressing student attendance issues were diverse in nature. Student attendance concerns were emphasized by the majority of the participants. This concern appeared to be schoolwide in scope, affecting students in all grades. Therefore, for the most part, the strategies shared by the participants were driven by the administrators rather than the individual educators.

Brandt (1992) concluded that there was a relationship between absenteeism of Aboriginal students and transportation. This paralleled Clint's belief in a strategy evolved at the administrative level to distribute bus tickets to students who could not afford a bus pass. This was an effective strategy because public transportation was the principal mode of transportation for the students of the school, who travelled from all areas of the city.

Feeding. Carl and Cam described a schoolwide breakfast and lunch program implemented in the school many years ago. This strategy was in response to several of the challenges facing students' preparedness for school, home lives, and poverty. This concurred with Wehler, Scott, Anderson, and Parker's (1991) endorsement of school lunch programs as a means of safeguarding the health and cognitive development of children who are at risk for undernutrition. The breakfast and lunch program at the school, although very effective, is not unique to urban Aboriginal education.

Resources

The participants addressed the challenge of scarce financial resources through strategies such as fundraisers and casinos. These seem to be effective strategies for confronting the recurring financial concerns that permeated many participants' responses.

In light of the financial cutbacks to education experienced in many Western Canadian provinces, this strategy is by no means unique to urban Aboriginal education. It is unfortunate that professionals charged with the responsibility of educating children are burdened with the responsibility of raising funds, soliciting monies from such enterprises as bingos and casinos, and expending their own financial resources to purchase materials, books, and other supplies which that very same government requires each school to have.

Summary

The findings relating to strategies evolved by educators in an urban Aboriginal school were discussed in this chapter. The discussion was propelled predominantly by the literature, with some reference to the field work and my observations.

The literature supported five of the six themes related to strategies used with students. The exception was student racism. However, the analysis of the data revealed that, although the participants offered strategies to address student racism, they did not perceive this matter to be a significant challenge. There was some disagreement between the literature, more specifically, Kleinfeld (1972, 1975), and three Caucasian educators with respect to the strategy of flexibility, as well as between the literature and the findings that discussed the subtheme of learning resources.

The literature corroborated both themes that emerged regarding the identification and evolution of educational strategies exercised with parents of urban Aboriginal students.

In reference to the identification and evolution of educator strategies, the literature specific to Aboriginal education supported the theme of staff cultural awareness as well as both subthemes identified by the participants. However, this was not the case with the theme and subthemes relating to staff wellness. This discussion seemed to be more global in nature; and, therefore, the literature discussed these topics in a general fashion.

As was the case with the discussion of the challenges associated with administrators, presented in Chapter V, several of the strategies discussed by the participants were unique and specific to the school. Although the literature appeared silent on many of the findings, I was also able to locate references to corroborate several of them.

Chapter VIII presents a summary, conclusions, recommendations, and implications of this study. Also included are my personal reflections regarding this study.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the study, a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations that emerged from the data, an expanded conceptual framework, and my personal reflections on the study.

Overview of the Study

This study had two objectives: to identify areas of challenge experienced by educators of Aboriginal children in an urban school and to detail various strategies used by educators to address these challenges.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

2. What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified?

3. How did these strategies evolve?

Methodology

This study used the case study approach. The sample involved a school from a large urban school district situated in a Western Canadian city. The school served a population of Aboriginal pupils ranging from Grades 5 to 9.

Permission to conduct the research was secured from the appropriate representative of the school district. The principal of the participating school, as well as the district's Native Education Consultant, were also contacted and provided with an explanation of the research. They expressed their approval and willingness to participate.

Semistructured interviews were used to collect data for this study. The interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes in duration. Interview questions were focused, but open-ended in nature. The content of the interview questions was derived from the literature, as well as previous survey research that I conducted. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by a typist.

All 16 professional staff of the participating school were invited to participate in this study, of which 10 agreed to be interviewed. In addition, three educators who were previously assigned to the school, as well as the Native Education Consultant who oversees the district's Aboriginal education programs, participated in the study.

Summary of Findings

This section presents, in point form the findings related to each of the three research questions. Following the detailing of the findings, the main research problem is restated and addressed in the conclusions section of the chapter.

Research Question 1

What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal School?

Challenges encountered with students.

1.0 Several participants spoke of their belief that Aboriginal students learn in ways different from those of the majority culture. One participant was hesitant to agree. However, he was quick to acknowledge that test data collected throughout the district were congruous with the literature supporting the existence of an Aboriginal learning style.

1.1 Challenges associated with language barriers were emphasized.

1.2 The subtheme of cultural diversity among urban Aboriginal students was identified as an educational challenge.

2.0 Student attendance was highlighted as a major educational challenge. Both the participants and the literature drew a correlation between student attendance and student achievement.

2.1 Aboriginal student transience was identified as a major educational challenge.

3.0 Student preparedness for school was perceived as a challenge.

3.1 Some educators who had previous experience in other schools, both inside and outside the district, insisted that

poor academic skills and attitudes toward school were more prevalent in the case school.

3.2 The participants overwhelmingly agreed that the home lives of the students were a significant contributor to their lack of preparedness.

3.3 The educators had mixed perceptions of the students' social skills. Some were critical of the students' apparent lack of social skills and were quick to identify them as a significant challenge. One participant questioned whether there might be cultural misconceptions among educators regarding this issue.

4.0 The vast majority of participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, agreed on the importance of establishing and maintaining a structured educational environment.

5.0 Analysis of the interview transcripts clearly identified student behavior as a challenge.

5.1 The findings revealed that some of the out-of-school activities of several urban Aboriginal students, especially gang involvement, were challenges.

5.2 Several participants deemed disrespect as significant. Although emphasized by both Aboriginal and Caucasian educators, student disrespect received the harshest criticism from Aboriginal staff.

5.3 Student self-esteem was identified as a challenge.

5.4 On the basis of the findings, it appeared that a lack of trust on the part of students was a significant

challenge. In addition, the educators emphasized that until trust between students and educators is established, a high degree of testing of educators' authority occurs.

5.5 The effects of addictions were identified as a challenge. The participants approached this subtheme in two ways. First, they described the challenge of students dealing with addictions. Second, the physiological effects of addictions -- specifically, fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, attention deficit disorder, and substance-abuse-related learning disabilities -- were clearly identified by the participants as significant challenges.

6.0 Disrespect for education by urban Aboriginal students was highlighted as a challenge. The discussion of this challenge was interesting in that Caucasian educators struggled for a *solution* to this problem, whereas Aboriginal educators were more inclined to reflect on the *root cause*.

6.1 Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that several participants felt that there was an absence of long-term goals among the students.

6.2 The subtheme of marginalized people -- the struggle to identify with both the Aboriginal culture and the mainstream culture -- was identified as a challenge. Many educators were quick to attribute this challenge to the home life of the students.

Challenges encountered with parents.

7.0 Poverty and issues related to poverty were clearly identified as major challenges. Many participants asserted that poverty and dysfunction are separate and distinct challenges. An additional finding that emerged was the linking of poverty to student attendance.

8.0 The majority of the participants indicated that parenting skills were a major challenge. However, the findings both corroborated and contradicted the literature.

8.1 The findings revealed the belief that within the urban Aboriginal community a cycle of poor parenting skills results from transience, a lack of goals, and "despair" among parents.

8.2 Participants theorized that Aboriginal parenting skills are directly influenced by parental understanding of and involvement in their culture.

8.3 Several participants of Aboriginal descent identified addictions as a challenge. Challenges resulting from parental addiction to alcohol, drugs, and gambling were discussed. Furthermore, this subtheme was discussed in terms of being both a result of and a contributor to concerns with parenting skills.

9.0 The findings indicated that parental distrust of mainstream education was a challenge. The participants characterized the magnitude of parental distrust as ranging from suspicion to downright loathing of the school.

9.1 Related to parental distrust was the subtheme suggesting that Aboriginal parents are often defensive with respect to mainstream education.

Challenges encountered with educators.

10.0 The theme of educator cultural conflict emerged as a result of the analysis of the interview transcripts. More specifically, the findings highlighted the need for cultural-awareness opportunities for staff.

10.1 Referring indirectly to inadequate teacher-preparation programs, it was stressed that many educators came to the school ill-prepared to serve the educational needs of urban Aboriginal students.

10.2 The subtheme of cultural misunderstandings on the part of educators emerged from the comments of several participants.

11.0 The challenge of job-related stress emerged as a result of the data analysis. Interestingly, the contributing factors suggested by the participants were not congruent with those discussed in the literature. Whereas the participants focused their comments on the high demand placed on them by the perceived "neediness" of the students, the literature focused primarily on stress resulting from the effects of student inconformity, believed to result from incompatible teaching methods.

11.1 Two administrators believed educator role diversity to be a significant challenge. Each thought that

he was expected to perform duties that were outside the usual realm of his administrative role.

12.0 Staff cohesion was discussed by the participants. Several indicated that there was tension among staff members at the school. This finding runs contrary to the discussion generated by several participants emphasizing the "family feelings" and interdependence among staff at the school as strategies that evolved to address educator challenges.

12.1 Frustration with what was perceived to be a district practice of assigning staff to the school who neither were prepared for nor wished to serve urban Aboriginal students was reported to be a challenge.

12.2 The participants identified as a challenge educator racism toward Aboriginal people. This issue was approached in two ways. First, several spoke of some educators' racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Second, the district practice of "dumping" people at the school, resulting in the assignment of "racist" educators to the school, was discussed.

12.3 Four participants, two Aboriginal and two Caucasian, claimed that the racist attitudes of Aboriginal staff were a challenge.

Challenges encountered with administrators.

13.0 The school mandate was identified as an educational challenge. In elaboration, many felt that there has been a steady and growing inconsistency between the philosophy of

the original Aboriginal education program and what was actually happening.

13.1 Concern was raised regarding cultural voids involving the current spiritual and cultural programming offered at the school.

14.0 The segregation of urban Aboriginal students was reported to be a challenge. Participants reported mixed perceptions of this issue, both in support of and against the current practice of providing a school that serves only Aboriginal students.

14.1 The findings indicated concern that the school fostered an atmosphere that pampered students to the point that they would not be able to function in other educational settings.

15.0 Challenges were suggested that revolved around the restrictions placed on the school to adhere to external educational mandates, thereby preventing the school from meeting the unique educational needs of urban Aboriginal students.

15.1 Frustration was voiced with both the lack of continuity among the staff with respect to instructional and student-conduct expectations and the high degree of staff turnover.

15.2 The findings indicated that because the school serves students from various Aboriginal communities and

cultural backgrounds, friction among groups regularly occurs.

16.0 Disrespect for the school stemming from both district practices and personnel within the district was identified as a challenge.

16.1 The participants adamantly asserted that the school had become a "dumping ground" for urban Aboriginal students who had experienced academic and behavioral difficulties in other district schools.

17.0 The schools' lack of financial resources was reported to be a major challenge.

17.1 Concern was expressed regarding a shortage of appropriate curricular programs and supplemental resources, which was attributed to a shortage of money.

17.2 Because of provincial funding cutbacks and a decrease in enrollment at the time of this study, some participants believed that the school was simply not fiscally feasible.

Research Questions 2 and 3

What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified, and how did these strategies evolve?

Strategies used with students.

18.0 Strategies that enhance relationships between students and educators were effective in addressing student challenges such as self-esteem, lack of student trust, and

student testing of authority. As well, the negative effects of confrontation were emphasized. The participants reported that these strategies evolved from readings and university course work in Aboriginal education and the teachings of the Elders.

18.1 The data identified earning the trust of students as necessary in order to build effective relationships with urban Aboriginal students.

18.2 An effective strategy with urban Aboriginal students was having patience, which evolved from experience, consulting other educators, and reading. Yelling at or reacting to students was a strategy that was reported to be ineffective.

18.3 The educators identified the strategy of using democracy in relations with students, which evolved from their own life experiences.

18.4 Several participants claimed that developing friendships with their students was an effective strategy.

18.5 The importance of devoting extra time and heart to their positions was a strategy identified.

18.6 The data indicated that using humor was an effective strategy.

19.0 Having high expectations of their students was an effective strategy to address such student challenges as preparedness, structure, behaviors, and respect for education. Some participants attributed the evolution of

this strategy to prior teaching experiences in other districts.

19.1 The data indicated that maintaining a highly structured learning environment, at both the classroom and school levels, was an effective strategy.

19.2 Several participants said that they stressed the importance of goal setting with students.

19.3 The use of rewards was reported as a strategy. However, there was some disagreement among the participants as to the type and frequency.

20.0 The majority of the participants pointed out the need to be flexible when working with urban Aboriginal students. One educator reported that this strategy evolved from experience gained from volunteering at the school prior to becoming a teacher.

21.0 Strategies related to curriculum and instruction were identified and discussed. These strategies were delineated and presented in accordance with three subthemes:
(a) learning styles, (b) learning resources, and
(c) culture.

21.1 A variety of strategies were discussed in response to a recurring theme throughout the study -- that there is a unique learning style for Aboriginal students. The evolution of these strategies was attributed to university coursework and readings in intercultural education.

21.2 In response to an inability to locate learning resources that were both age and ability appropriate, one participant developed her own.

21.3 Several participants put forth strategies they used to teach or enhance culture with their students. These strategies were depicted as administrative, schoolwide, and classroom based in nature.

22.0 Modelling was used to address deficiencies in both students' social skills and their respect levels.

23.0 Although it was not identified as a significant challenge, several participants discussed strategies they used to address student racism.

Strategies used with parents.

24.0 In response to such parental challenges as distrust of mainstream education and parental defensiveness, the strategy of building relationships with parents was discussed. Several of the strategies evolved as a result of the teachings of the Elders.

25.0 The data indicated that a strategy that educators used with parents was insisting on accountability. The evolution of this strategy was attributed to experience and participating in pilot projects conducted in other school jurisdictions.

Strategies used with educators.

26.0 The data revealed that an effective strategy was for educators to increase their awareness of Aboriginal culture. Cultural awareness evolved from various sources, including the Elders, immersion in Aboriginal culture, inservices, and university courses.

26.1 Several Aboriginal educators identified judging and having a "missionary" attitude as ineffective, counter-productive strategies.

26.2 Although many participants held that being aware of Aboriginal culture was an effective strategy, several participants emphasized the importance of educators being aware that not all cultural teachings apply to all Aboriginal peoples.

27.0 Staff wellness was a theme that emerged from the analysis of the data. Strategies related to staff wellness were identified and discussed in accordance with four subthemes: (a) selective dissociation, (b) establishing limits, (c) interdependence, and (d) physical activity.

27.1 Several participants noted that a strategy that they had evolved during their time at the school was to ensure that they maintained a balance between work and their outside lives.

27.2 Limiting after-school commitments was put forth as a strategy for ensuring staff wellness.

27.3 Working as a team and sharing among staff were considered effective strategies.

27.4 Being physically active was described as an effective strategy to maintain wellness.

Strategies used with administrators.

28.0 Adjusting the length of the school day as well as providing for weekly staff meetings were administrative strategies employed at the school that evolved from staff input to administrators. In addition, the administrators adjusted the school's timetable to meet the educational needs of urban Aboriginal students. The strategy of removing chronically disruptive students from the school was also discussed; however, some participants voiced criticism of this practice.

28.1 Fostering a family atmosphere was reported as an effective strategy that benefited both students and staff.

28.2 Although it was questioned by one Aboriginal educator, offering cultural programming at the school was identified as an effective strategy.

28.3 Organizing the school's student dance troupe was highlighted as an effective strategy to increase the school's profile and respect throughout the district.

28.4 Analysis of the interview transcripts indicated that several effective counselling programs were offered at the school.

28.5 Several strategies addressing student attendance were identified.

28.6 An effective strategy for addressing student's preparedness for school, their home lives, and poverty was offering a daily schoolwide breakfast and lunch program.

29.0 In response to the challenge of scarce financial resources at the school, fundraising was conducted.

Conclusions

This study examined (a) the challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school, and (b) the strategies that educators used to address these challenges. The conclusions for this study are based on the findings. More specifically, the conclusions are organized into categories that correspond with each of the research questions.

Research Question 1

What are the challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school?

The research indicated that challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal students are directly influenced by students, their parents, educators, and administrators. The overall conclusion of this research is that there are unique challenges encountered by educators in an urban Aboriginal school. Moreover, most of the challenges described by the participants were task related rather than personal in

nature. With the exception of the discussion on student discourtesy and student disrespect for education, both the Aboriginal and Caucasian participants appeared to agree on the challenges identified.

The findings indicated that language barriers, cultural diversity among urban Aboriginal students, transience, preparedness for school, structure, trust and testing, effects of addictions, absence of goals, and cultural voids were challenges that appear to be unique to urban Aboriginal education.

The participants overwhelmingly supported the literature (e.g., Browne, 1990; Irvine & York, 1995; More, 1993; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Whyte, 1986; Wilgosh & Mulcahy, 1993) that claimed that Aboriginal students learn in unique ways. Educators should therefore be cognizant of these aspects and align their pedagogical efforts to serve the educational needs of these children effectively.

As well, unique challenges related to the parents of urban Aboriginal students were discussed. Consistent with the assertions of Ogbu (1993), parental distrust of mainstream education was the most pronounced of the parental challenges discussed. The vicious circle of despair experienced by many Aboriginal parents, along with cultural voids and addictions, although not unique to urban settings, nonetheless were identified as challenges unique to Aboriginal education.

Issues such as student home lives, poverty, attendance, social skills, behavior, gang involvement, and self-esteem although highlighted as challenges, were not necessarily unique to urban Aboriginal education. Instead, perhaps they were more attributable to factors relating to the inner city -- the milieux of the overwhelming majority of the urban Aboriginal students in this study.

Many of the challenges pertaining to educators and administrators were unique to urban Aboriginal education. Among the most accentuated were challenges associated with the lack of preparedness of educators, cultural conflict of educators, reverse racism, and district disrespect for the school. Many of the challenges associated with educators are far from surprising in that, of the six Caucasian educators interviewed, only two had any teacher training in Aboriginal or intercultural education.

Perhaps the most contentious issue raised by the participants was the perceived district practice of using the school as a "dumping ground" for Aboriginal students who were not successful in other district schools. The vast majority of the participants not only identified this as a challenge, but also voiced their discomfort with the philosophical underpinnings associated with this practice.

Several of the educator and administrator challenges were not exclusive to urban Aboriginal education; for

example, job-related stress, role diversity, staff cohesiveness, and financial concerns.

Research Question 2

What strategies do educators use to address the challenges identified?

With the exception of strategies targeting student goal setting and parental accountability, the strategies put forth by the participants appeared to be used to treat symptoms of the aforementioned challenges, not the root causes.

There was consistency among participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, in identifying relationships, high expectations, and flexibility as predominant themes throughout the discussion of strategies used with students. The participants were also in agreement in identifying strategies to address curriculum and instruction, social-skills enhancement, and antiracism. Success with urban Aboriginal students seemed dependent on whether or not these strategies were used. Confrontation and yelling were less likely to be successful.

Generally, the strategies suggested to address parental challenges were very similar to those put forth for students (relationship building and accountability). Understandably, discussion on this topic by educators who were not in either an administrative or a counselling role was rather limited due to the nature of the teachers' role.

The topic of staff cultural awareness was, to say the least, multifaceted. Several Aboriginal participants asserted that although awareness of Aboriginal culture is an essential element for success with urban Aboriginal students, various potential traps are inherent in it. This was especially pronounced in the discussion of the unsuccessful practice of some non-Aboriginal educators who approached Aboriginal students with a "missionary," "I am going to save you" attitude.

Although the participants seemed genuinely to enjoy their experiences at the school, staff wellness was a theme that was discussed. They maintained personal wellness by selective dissociation, establishing limits, being interdependent, and being physically active. Although deemed as being very important by the participants, none of these strategies is unique to educators of urban Aboriginal students.

Possibly attributable to their professional training and cultural incongruity, there was disagreement among educators with respect to the strategy of removing behaviorally difficult students from the school. Of the participants who favored removing disruptive students, two had served in administrative capacities, and all were Caucasian. The educator who was adamantly opposed to this practice was Aboriginal. Despite these differences, both

sides on this issue presented altruistic reasons for their opinions.

Research Question 3

How did these strategies evolve?

For the most part, discussion on the evolution of the strategies was specific to urban Aboriginal education. More specifically, the majority of the discussion centered around the evolution of strategies to address the pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual needs of urban Aboriginal children.

Unlike the conclusions drawn from the other two questions, there were definite contrasts between Aboriginal and Caucasian educators with respect to the evolution of strategies. Generally, the Aboriginal educators had more formal and informal training in Aboriginal educational issues than did their Caucasian colleagues. Moreover, the principal means of enlightenment reported by Aboriginal participants were teachings by Elders and their grandparents.

Although some Caucasian participants attributed the evolution of their strategies to the teachings of the Elders, most indicated that their strategies evolved through experience on the job, experimentation, observation, corroboration with other educators, and their education.

The strategies evolved addressed both the holistic and the pedagogical needs of urban Aboriginal children. However, the data reveal that most of the strategies to address

holistic needs were evolved by the Aboriginal educators, whereas most of the pedagogical strategies were evolved by the Caucasian educators. This is to be expected, in that of the eight Aboriginal educators interviewed, five served in nonclassroom capacities in which they were responsible for the holistic needs of the students; whereas five of the six Caucasian participants had classroom assignments.

Each year the district provides several Aboriginal-focused workshops, inservices, and retreats. Interestingly, although some participants referred to these professional-development efforts as a means of evolving their strategies, there was not as much emphasis on these sources as I would have expected. Instead, the participants, both Aboriginal and Caucasian, credited other modes as having more impact on their evolution of strategies.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this study lead to several recommendations for both practice and future research.

Recommendations for Practice

It is recommended that school districts afford school administrators autonomy in selecting staff. The practice of "dumping" personnel into schools that require specialized teacher training is, to say the least, counterproductive. Referring to this study, only staff who were trained and had

a strong desire to serve the unique educational needs of urban Aboriginal students should have been assigned to the school.

It is recommended that teacher education programs establish standards for selecting teacher candidates that include assessing cultural sensitivity and attitudes towards student diversity. Perhaps this would lend itself to early detection of characteristics of racial incongruence and intolerance. These issues could then be addressed through coursework related to diversity training.

It is recommended that teacher candidates be required to have student teaching experiences in Aboriginal settings. This could be facilitated through establishing partnerships between universities and school districts. As well, teacher internships in Aboriginal schools should be extended to teacher candidates with limited Aboriginal exposure prior to their employment in schools with high Aboriginal student enrollments.

It is recommended that school districts provide their educators with encouragement and incentive to return to universities for further education in Aboriginal and intercultural issues. Some of the participants reported that at the time of this study, they were enrolled in graduate-level study in these disciplines. Oishi (1974) concluded that "teachers returning to university are more progressive than teachers who do not.... [Therefore,] it seems

appropriate that school boards and teacher's associations should continue to encourage their teachers to return to university for professional improvement" (p. 77).

It is recommended that school districts that serve Aboriginal students ensure that inservice and workshop opportunities in Aboriginal education issues are provided to their staffs. Ideally, these opportunities would be offered at the commencement of the school year and would be tailored to the issues facing each district school. The findings of this study indicated that participants gained the majority of their Aboriginal cultural awareness from the experience gained at the school, not formal inservices. However, this was not the case with pedagogical issues. Therefore, professional development programs should be designed around specific objectives that concentrate on pedagogical areas, especially those related to Aboriginal learning preferences.

It is recommended that schools make concerted efforts to establish relationships with the parents of Aboriginal students. Perhaps this could be facilitated through expanding the school's mandate to include programs that further encourage connections between the school and community.

It is recommended that parent programs be established to address parenting-skills concerns. A theme that permeated throughout the interviews was that of concerns with parents. In order to address the "root" of this issue, the school

should facilitate programs that cater to families rather than concentrating exclusively on students. Programs such as family intervention, parenting skills, addictions counselling, and cultural healing were recommended by the participants. Moreover, it is recommended that these programs be conducted by specialists, (i.e., psychologists, social workers, Elders, cultural facilitators) who are not only highly trained in providing these programs, but also especially aware of Aboriginal matters.

It is recommended that educational systems make a more concerted effort to involve Aboriginal people in decisions affecting Aboriginal education at the school, district, and provincial levels. Alberta Education (1987a) consulted with Aboriginal people and reported their findings with respect to what they want for Aboriginal education. However, what is the status of the implementation of these requests? Are we truly listening, or are we simply patronizing? In a similar vein, Alberta Education (1987b), in another report, claimed that it recognizes the needs of Aboriginal people with respect to education. However, it seems that it is one thing to recognize needs, but it is quite another to act to address these needs.

It is recommended that schools that serve Aboriginal students ensure that culturally relevant curricular resources are available to enhance further the achievement and motivation of students.

It is recommended that districts find alternative ways of funding schools that have unique mandates or circumstances. In these cases, strict adherence to funding formulas driven by enrollment may result in funding insufficient to provide the staffing and resources required to be effective.

It is recommended that school districts closely examine and monitor the mandates of schools of choice. This recommendation is based on the findings of this study, which revealed that over the past several years the original mandate for the school, which was based on an altruistic foundation with the intent to provide an educational setting for urban Aboriginal students that celebrated Aboriginal culture and diversity, had in fact regressed to become a convenient "dumping ground" for Aboriginal students who were not successful in other district schools. To be truly effective, this initiative must involve *all* stakeholders in the process.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that this study be replicated using another school of similar size, offering the same grades, which also serves only urban Aboriginal students. Ideally, this school would be situated in another school district, in another urban setting. Because of a lack of research focusing on urban Aboriginal education, this replication

would provide further verification of and generalizability to the findings reported in this study.

It is recommended that this study be replicated using an urban school that serves an inner-city population of mainstream students. The school used in this research was located in an area of the city deemed to be inner city. Moreover, the vast majority of the students attending the school lived in areas of the city identified as inner city. Replication of this study using another inner-city school with open enrollment would allow for a more conclusive determination of whether the various challenges and strategies identified are unique to urban Aboriginal students.

It is recommended that this study be replicated with an expansion of the research design to allow for comparison between band-operated schools located in rural settings and urban, publicly funded schools serving only Aboriginal students. For the most part, the literature did not differentiate Aboriginal issues in the context of urban versus rural. Therefore, the inferences drawn from the literature are general in nature. Replication would allow for further insight into what role demographic setting plays in Aboriginal education. As well, this type of investigation would further assist in casting light on the *inner-city* dimension.

It is recommended that this study be replicated with an expansion of the research design to allow for comparison between other minority groups, identified by Ogbu (1993) as voluntary and involuntary minorities. Ogbu maintained that members of the voluntary minority group "do not manifest the kinds of attitudes and behaviors commonly found among involuntary minority children" (p. 105). Replication of this study using exclusive populations of both voluntary minority groups and other involuntary minority groups would provide further knowledge on and verification of Ogbu's theory.

It is recommended that this study be replicated with more consideration given to the differences between Aboriginal and Caucasian educators. According to Stairs (1995), "the roles of a Native and a non-Native educator in ostensibly the same position, even in the same school, differ in multiple ways" (p. 147). This study, although it highlighted and reported differences between the two races, did not specifically focus on this factor. Only blatant differences or self-professed differences that emerged from the data analysis were reported. I made no concerted effort to gain a perspective from any participant using her/his race as a basis.

It is recommended that this study be replicated with consideration given to the differences in the roles of the educators. This study involved educators who served the school in various capacities. The findings were not

delineated based on the participants' roles. Instead, the findings were analyzed and reported concentrating on what was said, not on who said it. Replication of the study with an emphasis on examining perceptual differences based on educator position would prove enlightening.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to examine the ethical, altruistic, and fiscal consequences of segregating Aboriginal students from mainstream students. The participants had mixed perceptions on this practice. Further research would provide additional insight.

Expanded Conceptual Framework

Using the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter II, data were collected that described the challenges and opportunities encountered by educators of Aboriginal children in an urban setting; as well as the strategies evolved to address them. It was expected that the resultant findings and discussion would allow for further understanding of urban Aboriginal education. For the most part, the findings of the study supported the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1). However, upon completion of this research it became evident that modifications were necessary. The suggested revisions, although requiring further research in order to lend validity, are shown in Figure 8.1. This expanded conceptual framework, based on the findings, more precisely and completely represents the challenges and opportunities encountered by educators of

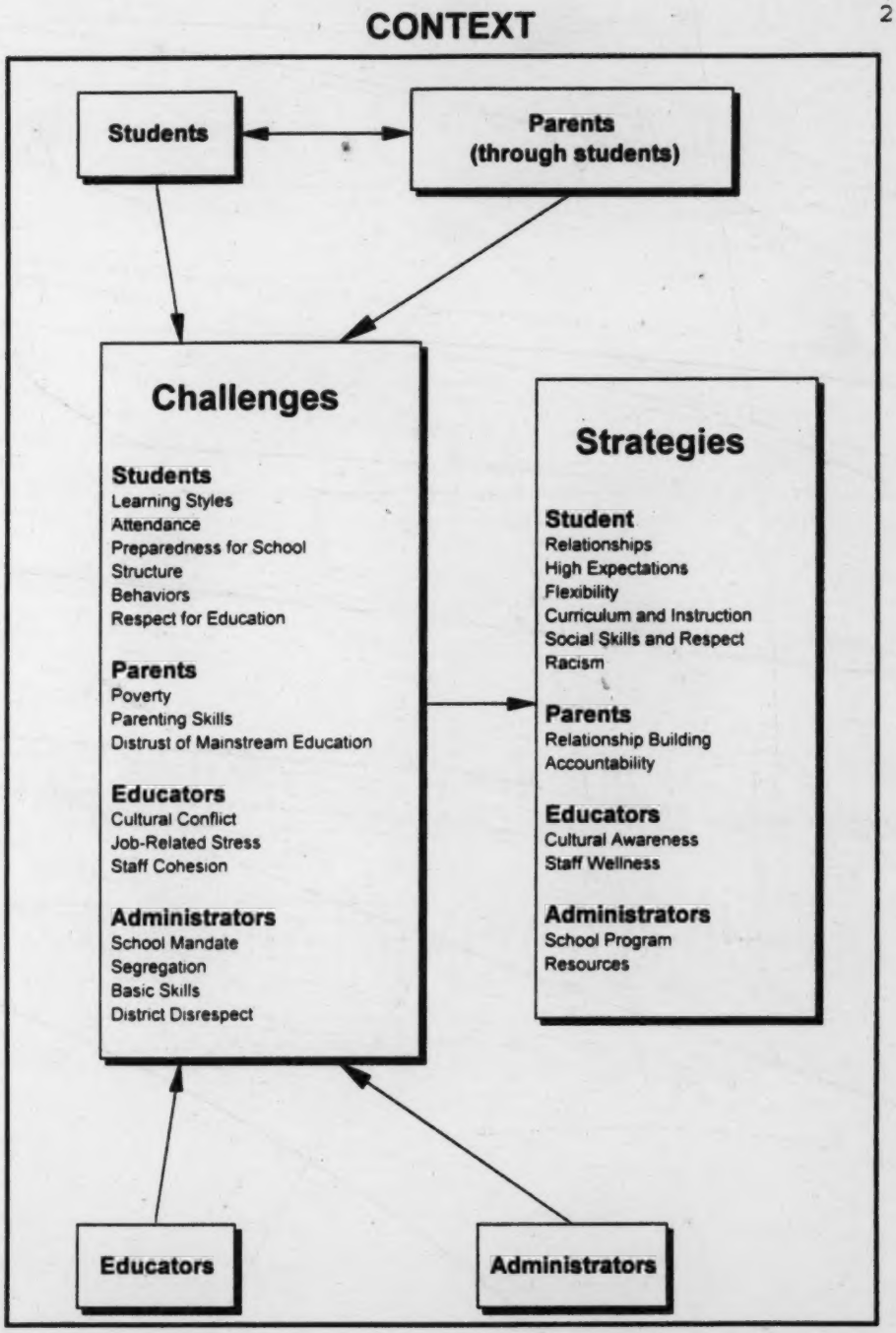

Figure 8.1. Expanded conceptual framework including strategies for educators of urban Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal children in an urban setting as well as the strategies evolved to address them and is therefore incorporated as emergent theory.

An important modification to the conceptual framework is the direct reference to the context of the school. Because I chose to study an urban school that served only Aboriginal students, one cannot ignore the context in which the study took place. Therefore, Figure 8.1 clearly encloses all the variables within the confines of the context, thus accentuating that some or all of the findings may have occurred because of the urban setting in which the school was located. This could be substantiated, however, only through further research, including replication of the study. Nevertheless, the implication is that the setting is significant and thereby influenced the findings.

The original conceptual framework, using the literature as a basis, itemized only the challenges and opportunities encountered by educators of urban Aboriginal students. Because of a lack of literature, it did not depict the strategies evolved to address them. The findings of this research, and thus the expanded conceptual framework have addressed the strategies.

The expanded conceptual framework is delineated in terms of (a) students, (b) parents, (c) educators, and (d) administrators.

Students

The major student challenges identified were (a) student learning preferences, (b) inconsistent student attendance, (c) student preparedness for school, (d) inability of students to adapt to a structured educational environment, (e) student behaviors, and (f) low student respect for education. The principal strategies evolved by educators to address these challenges were (a) building relationships, (b) establishing and maintaining high expectations, (c) being flexible, (d) adapting both curriculum and instruction, and (e) modelling -- which addressed both social skills and issues of student racism.

Parents

The original conceptual framework depicted an indirect link between parents and the challenges encountered by educators. As represented in Figure 8.1, the findings pointed to a direct connection between parents and students, and subsequently between students and the challenges identified.

The findings revealed that parental influence on students, and therefore the challenges encountered, involved such circumstances as (a) family poverty, (b) inadequate parenting skills, and (c) parental distrust of mainstream education, which had a direct effect on students. The findings of this study emphasized the need for further research, to determine whether or not the parental

challenges identified are indeed unique to Aboriginal education or whether they are characteristic of factors such as socioeconomic status.

The main strategies evolved by educators to address these challenges were relationship building between parents and educators, and holding parents accountable for educational issues pertaining to their children.

Educators

The major educator challenges identified were (a) educator cultural conflict, (b) high degrees of job-related stress, and (c) lack of cohesiveness among staff. The main strategies evolved to address these challenges emerged as (a) increasing educator awareness of Aboriginal culture, and (b) proactively maintaining staff wellness.

Administrators

The original conceptual framework described issues of administration as having an indirect impact on the identified challenges. The findings, however, revealed that this link is in fact a direct one. Moreover, such factors as standardized testing and student evaluation procedures, which were hypothesized as being significant in the original conceptual framework, were not substantiated by the findings.

Instead, the participants identified the major challenges associated with administrators as (a) the

school's mandate, (b) the practice of segregating Aboriginal students, (c) basic skill acquisition, (d) overall disrespect for the school as demonstrated by the district, and (e) scarcity of resources.

The findings revealed that the principal strategies evolved included adjustments to the programming, timetable, and overall mandate of the school. In addition, fundraising was identified as a strategy evolved to address perceived deficiencies to the allotted resources, both material and financial.

Personal Reflections

As we move toward the next millennium, one of the most pressing issues that faces Canada's education system is how to face the responsibility of providing appropriate educational experiences to Aboriginal students. This research was my attempt to contribute to this pursuit.

My interest in this study came about as a result of my own personal involvement in Aboriginal education. I have held the position of principal of an Aboriginal school. This experience has been very helpful in understanding the issues raised by the participants. However, I had to continually remind myself of my own biases and views on matters pertaining to Aboriginal education.

Calder (1977) claimed that science is a "process of conceptualization, which seeks to represent the real world in a simple enough way to allow understanding" (p. 354). He

further stated "one must be able to use constructs to interpret the real world, to determine whether real objects and behaviors possess the properties and relationships embodied in scientific theory" (p. 354). To my way of thinking, these statements summarize what is involved in testing a theory. With this in mind, my intention in this study was to test my theory that there are unique challenges encountered by educators of urban Aboriginal students. In addition, educators have had to evolve strategies to address these challenges.

Several of the outcomes of my research, I believe, substantiate this theory. However, I am plagued by the question, are the challenges described unique to urban Aboriginal education, or are they more indicative of the issues which face inner-city education, of which urban Aboriginal education is only a segment? Upon reflection, I am led to believe that it is a combination of both.

According to Hampton (1995), "most schools for Native children retain assimilation goals ... and have high failure rates" (p. 9). With this in mind, a theme that emerged from discussions with the 14 talented and dedicated educators was discomfort with the practice of segregating urban Aboriginal students. Although the practice of segregation met with some support, it also faced harsh criticism. Perhaps more than anything else, this issue has become pivotal for me as I continue to grapple with my beliefs of Aboriginal education.

On the one hand, I feel that schools such as the one studied in this research address many of the conditions described by Hawthorn (1967), who asserted:

> It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing. Third, in both segregated and integrated schools, one of the main aims teachers expressed with reference to Indians is to "help them improve their standard of living, or their general lot, or themselves" which is another way of saying what they are and have now is not good enough; they must do and be other things. (p. 142)

On the other hand, if the agenda of such schools is in the least bit deceptive, situations could arise that (a) lend validity to Hampton's claim as quoted above, and/or (b) lead to what Chrisjohn and Young (1998) characterized as a "self-fulfilling prophecy" for Aboriginal education. That is, "If you believe that some people are inherently limited, you behave (perhaps even arrange your world) in accordance with those limits, and thereby bring them into existence" (p. 11). Therefore, we must be cognizant of these concerns and protect such schools from becoming district sites that address hidden agendas aimed at protecting district reputations versus the altruistic motivation of improving education opportunities for Aboriginal children.

As was emphasized in the *Recommendations for Practice* section of this study, it is imperative that teacher candidates be made more aware of intercultural issues

throughout their teacher education. Supported by my experience as a teacher and an administrator, as well as my research, I strongly agree with this. Alana lent support to this through her recommendation that "somehow the [teacher] education system academically has to look at the teachers, and they have to give them some understanding because they will probably be running into Native people and teaching them."

Nevertheless, Chrisjohn and Ayoungman (1996) highlighted the shortfall of Alberta's postsecondary institutions in addressing Aboriginal issues through their claim that "the total public funding spent at the University of Calgary on aboriginal projects is less than that spent on 'The Origin of Dolomite in the Western Canada Sedimentary Basin'" (p. 3).

I conclude this study with a quotation shared with me, early in my tenure as a principal, by an Elder. This quotation effectively reinforces many of the findings reported in this study.

> Successful teachers of Native children, whether or not they are Native, are characterized by their ability to create a climate of emotional warmth and to demand a high quality of academic work. They often take the role of personal friend, rather than that of impersonal professional, and use many nonverbal messages, frequently maintaining close body distance, touching to communicate warmth, and engaging in gentle teasing. After establishing positive interpersonal relationships at the beginning of the year, these teachers become demanding, as an aspect of their personal concern in a reciprocal obligation to further learning. Highly supportive of any attempt students make, these

teachers avoid even minor forms of direct criticism. Thus, these teachers are effective because of their instructional and interactional style, and not because of their ethnic or racial group membership.

(Author Unknown)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Name:_____

Date:_____

PRE-INTERVIEW

1. Purpose of Study

2. Methodology and Ethics

3. Completion of *Consent to Participate in Research* form

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Gender:
* female * male

Which year did you earn your teacher education degree(s)?

Where did you take your teacher training?

Which was your route of study at university or teacher college? (probe- elementary education, secondary education, adult education, vocational education)

How many years of education do you have for salary purposes?
* 4 years (* 5 years * 6 years -- what additional degrees and/or diploma(s) do you have?)

What other educational experiences have you participated in? (probe- inservice, retreats, workshops, university courses)

How many years at this school?

How many years with this district?

Have you taught elsewhere in this district? If so, what schools, and/or assignments?

Do you have teaching experience in any other districts? If so, what were they?

Please describe your current assignment? (probe- division, grade, core, subject)

CHALLENGES / OPPORTUNITIES ENCOUNTERED TEACHING IN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL SCHOOL / STRATEGIES USED TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES

As a(n) --- in this school, can you identify 4 or 5 (educational and personal) challenges / opportunities you face in the classroom (school)? (probe- curriculum, behavior management, assessment, personal conflict, stress)

What strategies do you use to address these challenges? (probe- collaboration with other staff, coursework, participation in cultural events)

How did you evolve these strategies? (probe- student/teacher interaction, experience, coursework, corroboration)

What strategies have you attempted to use which **did not** seem to be effective?

Why do you feel this was so?

As you reflect on the time you have been at this school, in your present position, how have your reactions to these challenges changed over time? (probe- do you respond differently, do you use specialized techniques, have you sought outside assistance)

PARTICIPANT SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

What do you need to become more successful at meeting the needs of Aboriginal children? (probe- support, curriculum, inservice, strategies in motivation)

My study is about identifying and addressing the perceived challenges experienced by educators of Aboriginal children attending an urban school. With this in mind, what recommendations do you have which may or may not have been touched upon in this interview?

Appendix B: Correspondence

University of Alberta
Edmonton

Canada T6G 2G5

Department of Educational Policy Studies
Educational Administration, Educational Foundations, Adult and Higher Education
Faculty of Education

7-104 Education Building North,
Telephone (403) 492-7625
Fax (403) 492-2024

January 9, 1998

Dr. XXXXXX XXXXXX
XXXXXXX XXX XXXXXX XXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX XXXXXX
XXXXXXXX, XXXXXXX
XXX XXX

RE: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED TEACHING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

Dear Dr. XXXXXX,

I am writing to request your consent to conduct research in the XXXXXXX XXXXXXXX School District.

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy Studies, at the University of Alberta. I have become very interested in identifying and addressing the challenges experienced by educators of Aboriginal children, attending urban schools.

I have received permission from the University of Alberta to conduct this research.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to conduct research at XXXXXXXXXXXXXX School. I choose this school because it is an urban school which provides for the educational needs of Aboriginal students.

I have contacted, and received tacit approval to conduct this research from both MX. XXXXX XXXXXX, Principal of XXXXXXXXXXXX School, and MX. XXXXXX XXXXXXXX, Native Education Consultant for your district.

My study involves one 60 - 90 minute interview with each of the following staff members from XXXXXXXXXXX School: 5 teachers, the student counsellor, one coordinator of Aboriginal programming, the assistant principal, and the principal. In addition, XXXXXX XXXXX will participate in an interview.

The interviews will be conducted in February, 1998. This research will not interfere with any instructional time of teachers. Nor will it disrupt the routine of the school in any way.

If you were to kindly lend your support to this study, results of my research will then be provided to you, without cost, for your information.

Thank you in advance for your time and anticipated cooperation. I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you as soon as they are available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or clarification of any issues related to this request.

Yours truly,

Ross C. Danyluk

XXX-XXXX (home/fax)
XXX-XXXX (cellular)
rdanyluk@compusmart.ab.ca (email)

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January 9, 1998

MX. XXXXX XXXXXX, Principal
XXXXXXXXXXXXX School

RE: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED TEACHING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

Dear Mx. XXXXXX,

I am writing to request your consent to conduct research in your school.

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy Studies, at the University of Alberta. I have become very interested in identifying and addressing the challenges experienced by educators of Aboriginal children, attending urban schools.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to conduct research at XXXXXXXXXXXXXX School. I selected your school because it is an urban school which provides for the educational needs of Aboriginal students. Therefore, your school would lend itself very well to the thesis of my research.

I have received permission from the University of Alberta to conduct this research. In addition, I have approached both Dr. XXXXX XXXXX, XXXXXXX XX XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX, and Mx. XXXXXX XXXXXX, Native Education Consultant requesting permission from the district for this research request.

My study involves one 60 - 90 minute interview with each of the following staff members from your school: 5 teachers, the student counsellor, one coordinator of Aboriginal programming, the assistant principal, and yourself.

The interviews will be conducted at your school in February, 1998. This research will not interfere with any instructional time of your teachers or yourself. Nor will it disrupt the routine of your school in any way.

If you were to kindly lend your support to this study, results my research will then be provided to you, without cost, for your information.

Thank you in advance for your time and anticipated cooperation. I look forward to the possibility of working with you and your staff.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or clarification of any issues related to either my research, or this request.

Yours truly,

Ross C. Danyluk

XXX-XXXX (home/fax)
XXX-XXXX (cellular)
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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED TEACHING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

Dear Mx. XXXXXX,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study. The following information is intended to assist you in making an informed decision whether to formally consent to participate.

The purpose of my study is to examine and provide suggestions relating to challenges encountered by educators of Aboriginal children attending urban schools.

You are asked to be involved in one or more 60 - 90 minute interview(s). The interview(s) will be audiotaped and later transcribed by a typist, who will ensure the confidentiality of all participants. You will be asked to read the transcription to confirm its accuracy. Audiotapes will be destroyed upon successful completion of all requirements of my doctoral program.

Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Nor will your identity as a participant be disclosed. Your identity will be strictly confidential.

Please be aware that you have the option to either (a) not to participate in, or (b) withdraw from this study at any time without fear of reprisal from myself, XXXXXXXX School, or XXXXX XXXXXX School District.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or clarification of any issues related to either my research, or this request.

(more...)

Your signature certifies that you have voluntarily elected to participate in this research study. It further signifies that you have been made aware of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this document will be provided to you for your records.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Ross C. Danyluk

XXX-XXXX (home/fax)
XXX-XXXX (cellular)
rdanyluk@compusmart.ab.ca (email)

_____
Mx. XXXXXX XXXXXX

_____
Date

ROSS C. DANYLUK

CURRICULUM VITAE

Educational History

1996 to 1998	University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta Doctor of Education; Educational Administration.
1994 to 1996	San Diego State University San Diego, California Master of Arts -- Education; Educational Administration.
1992 to 1994 (transferred to San Diego State University)	University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta Postgraduate Diploma; Secondary Education -- Curriculum.
1984 to 1989	University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta Bachelor of Education; Secondary Route -- Biological Science and Atypical Adolescents.

Experience In Education

August 1998 to present	Bosco Homes (Elk Island Public Schools) Edmonton, Alberta -Supervisor of Education Services

August 1994 to June 1997	Kitaskinaw Education Authority Enoch Cree Nation Winterburn, Alberta -Principal, Kitaskinaw School
August 1993 to June 1994	County of Minburn Vegreville, Alberta -Vice-Principal, -Science Teacher, Mannville School
September 1990 to June 1993	Edmonton Public Schools Edmonton, Alberta -Division I, II, III Behavior Disorder Teacher, Donnan School
September 1989 to June 1990	High Prairie School Division High Prairie, Alberta -Guidance Counsellor, -Special Education Teacher, -Administrative Assistant, Kinuso School

Conference Presentations

1998, August. *Identifying and Addressing Challenges Encountered by Recent Teacher Graduates -- An Aboriginal Focus*. Northland School Division, Peace River, AB

1997, February. *Identifying and Addressing Sources of Job-Related Stress Among Teachers of First Nations Students*. Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention, Edmonton, AB